April
1973
CD•08288

fantastic

Science Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

60c
25p in U.K.
75c in CANADA

THE SON OF BLACK MORCA

Beginning An Epic Fantasy by Alexei & Cory Panshin

THE RAVAGES OF SPRING by **John Gardner** ■ RAGS by **Jack Dann**
ONCE UPON A UNICORN by **F. M. Busby** ■ BUT THE OTHER OLD MAN STOPPED PLAYING by **C. L. Grant** ■ BIRD-SONG by **Wilmar H. Shiras**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Behind Your Conscious Mind...

Use these Extrasensory Powers

WHY LIMIT YOURSELF TO FIVE SENSES? Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting reveal only a part of life and reality. There is a world of perception—of greater realization behind your outer self.

Impressions of these extrasensory powers occasionally arise in your conscious mind. The strange feeling of an impending danger—that intuitive flash or hunch with its forceful clarity—or receiving the thought of another before he has spoken it—these are telltale indications of your unused potentialities.

No longer are these something to just wonder about and not to discuss. They are not supernatural or weird, but natural phenomena. To understand, develop, and direct them can transform your whole personality. They can provide greater insight and power of personal achievement.

Challenge these remarks! Write to the Rosicrucians, a worldwide cultural organization (not a religion) for the facts about your extrasensory powers. Stop denying the greater part of yourself!

ACCEPT THIS FREE BOOK

To those who have experienced these deeper psychic aspects of self and want to learn to bring them into service at will, the Rosicrucians offer the free book The Mastery Of Life. It tells how you may share in this practical knowledge.

Please use this coupon or write to:
SCRIBE: D.J.L.

The
ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

San Jose, California 95114, U.S.A.

Scribe D.J.L.
THE ROSICRUCIAN ORDER (AMORC)
San Jose, California 95114, U.S.A.
Gentlemen:
I am sincerely interested. Send me a free copy of THE MASTERY OF LIFE, which tells how I may receive this knowledge.

Name.....
Address.....
City.....State.....Zip.....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fantastic
Science Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

APRIL, 1973 VOL. 22, NO. 4

ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN'S greatest new epic fantasy, **THE SON OF BLACK MORCA** 6

new novelet

THE RAVAGES OF SPRING
by JOHN GARDNER 46

new short stories

BUT THE OTHER OLD MAN STOPPED PLAYING
by C. L. GRANT 64

RAGS
by JACK DANN 72

BIRD-SONG
by WILMAR H. SHIRAS 82

ONCE UPON A UNICORN
by F. M. BUSBY 91

new features

EDITORIAL **by TED WHITE** 4

SF IN DIMENSION
THE SEARCH FOR MYSTERY (1958-1967)
by ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN 94

ACCORDING TO YOU 114

Cover Copyright 1973 by ESTEBAN MAROTO

SOL COHEN, Publisher
ARTHUR BERNHARD, Associate Publisher
TED WHITE, Editor
GRANT CARRINGTON, Associate Editor
MOSHE FEDER, Assistant Editor
J. EDWARDS, Art Director
PRINT ADVERTISING REP., INC., Advertising Manager
LILLIAN FRIEDENREICH, Subscription Manager

FANTASTIC, Vol. 22, No. 4, **APRIL, 1973,** *is published bi-monthly by* **ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC.,** *69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. 60¢ a copy. Subscription rates: One year (6 issues) United States and possession: $3.00; Canada and Pan American Union countries: $3.50; all other countries, $4.00. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y., and at additional mailing office.*

Copyright 1973 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TED WHITE

editorial

A LETTER FROM YOUR LOCAL DEALER IN DISTRESS

by Frank Eck

This month I'd like to turn over the podium to reader Frank Eck, whose "Letter from Your Local Dealer in Distress" both summarizes and satirizes some of the problems our readers report from time to time, in their unending search for each issue of this magazine . . . —TW

DEAR TED:

I live in a small town on the wrong side of the Okeefenokee Swamp (pop. 2013). For that matter it ain't so hot on the right side of the Okeefenokee Swamp neither. Now I been living in these neck of the woods for all my life. I run a sort of grocery, post office, and gossip store. Been managing this place for the last thirteen years. Before that I was a salesman for an outfit that sold pogo sticks and then one day while I was demonstrating my product, well let's just say that I had a blinding moment of self revelation and I realized this wasn't the right kind of business for a grown man to be in. Well since then I've been running this store and things have been going pretty good, not great mind you, but all right.

Oh sure I've had my problems like when old Captain Hillcrest shot his cannon at my store and missed hitting it by only three feet. He was upset, you see, because I had mistakenly sent him a carton of cumquat juice instead of a carton of 120% proof corn liquor. The cumquat juice was for our old constipated school marm. Then there was the time when the swamp monster crawled out of the marshes and I was forced to feed it my entire supply of licorice and number 9 corded string. Nobody knows who the swamp monster is but I'll bank my money that it's the local Reverend's idiot son.

By now you're probably wondering what in hell water and swamp mud does this gentleman want. To come right out with it Ted, you've caused me a heap of worry since you've taken over those two shrimp magazines—AMAZING and FANTASTIC. To explain how this whole thing started let me introduce the cast of characters involved. First of all, there is Sadie Lickum's, a pigtailed acneed twit with buck teeth and braces. Her favorite candy is purple jaw breakers and her favorite magazine is FANTASTIC.

(cont. on page 126

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OWN A BOWLFULL OF HAPPINESS . . . AMAZING LIVE

Sea-Monkeys®

The World's Only INSTANT LIVE PETS!

You'll *gasp* with **AMAZEMENT** when you see adorable baby Sea-Monkeys® *actually* being born **ALIVE** before your eyes in *only* **ONE SECOND!** *Guaranteed* to *live* and to *grow*, this *incredible* **NEW MIRACLE OF SCIENCE** has been granted Patent #3,673,986 by the United States Government for our *astounding discovery* of the formula for making **INSTANT LIFE!®**

MILLIONS THRILLED *BEYOND* WORDS!

Your Sea-Monkeys® will arrive safe and sound because they are shipped to you in *fantastic* "time-capsule" eggs that can **STAY ALIVE** up to **100 YEARS** *without harm*, yet—put them in water conditioned with our Patented formula, and like **MAGIC** they "pop" out of their **eggs ALIVE** and **SWIMMING**. *Millions* of people around the world are now loyal Sea-Monkey® "fans", raising and **BREEDING** their pets as an almost *unbelievably thrilling* **HOBBY!** Sea-Monkeys®, a *laboratory-developed* variety of *Artemia salina*, can grow **TWICE** as **LARGE** and live up to 20 times **LONGER** than those found in nature. And they're **SO EASY** to raise, even a six-year old child can do so without help. But, whether six or **SIXTY**, anyone who enjoys keeping **LIVE** pets will *adore* owning pet Sea-Monkeys®

IN *YOUR* HOME — A *LIVE* SEA-CIRCUS!

NOW, *imagine* having a whole tumbling, happy circus of live, scampering Sea-Monkeys®. Watching them "clown around" while they scoot and play provides an *endless source* of **FUN** and **LAUGHS** for you and your *entire* **FAMILY!** Best of **ALL**, we will **SHOW** you how to *utterly astonish* your friends by making your Sea-Monkeys® appear to do *tricks* and *stunts* at **YOUR COMMAND!** Since *every single word* that you have just read is **ABSOLUTELY TRUE**, we ship your Sea-Monkeys® with a *No-Risk* **FULL MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE** that *even includes your postage!* So fill in the Coupon and make room for a *bowlfull of happiness*—Amazing Live **SEA-MONKEYS®!**

★FREE!★

ONE-YEAR SUPPLY of Sea-Monkey® **GROWTH FOOD**; A supply of *LIVING PLASMA* and a supply of **WATER PURIFIER** Formula. A magnificent fully-illustrated Manual of Sea-Monkey® Care, Raising, Training and Breeding; PLUS our Famous **GROWTH GUARANTEE IN WRITING!**

Caricatures shown not intended to depict Artemia salina.

UNCONDITIONALLY GUARANTEED!

Transcience Corporation Dept. 71-C
200 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10010

I CAN HARDLY WAIT! Please send my Sea-Monkey® kit(s) and my FREE supplies and GUARANTEE. I must be 100% satisfied or you will refund my money. I enclose $1.00 plus 50¢ for postage and handling for each kit.

Send.....kit(s) ☐ Cash ☐ Check ☐ Money Order
(No C.O.D.'s Please) Total amount enclosed $.....

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name.....

Address.....Apt. No.....

City.....State.....Zip.....

Copyright © 1972 Transcience Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alexei Panshin has published only a few books, but those have garnered much acclaim, from the Nebula Award winner, Rite of Passage, *to the controversial critical work,* Heinlein in Dimension, *and including the wittily farcical Villiers series. With his wife Cory, he has written* The World Beyond the Hill, *a massive critical examination of sf based in large part upon their column here,* SF in Dimension. *Now Alexei and Cory turn their hands to the novel of fantasy: A world wherein magic works, but human intrigues are no less earnest; A world of barbarian invaders and shifting morés; The world of—*

THE SON OF BLACK MORCA

ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

(First of Three Parts)

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

PART I: ESCAPE

1

THE DUN OF Black Morca, War King of the Gets and as much of a ruler as Nestor could boast, lay out of sight behind the rise of two grassy hill shoulders. In this country, in these times, that was dangerously far.

It was a cool day in mid-spring, a Libera's Day that fell in that month when the sun was in the sign of the Wurox, Libera's beast. It was a few hours after a freshening rain and the sky still held to an even gray. In the long hill grass at the edge of an oak wood a hunting pig cast back and forth for the scent of a rabbit. Following afoot, arrow nocked on string and eyes alert, was a boy of sixteen named Haldane—nearly a man, but not yet a man—the one son of Black Morca.

He had been warned to stay within sight of the tower as he had been warned not to hunt alone. There were times when he did both, but this was not one. He was empty-handed so far, and he would not be. He was ranging far for a Get on foot, chancing the end

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of daylight, as vulnerable as any Nestorian cowherd to a meeting with Get baron or Nestorian outlaw. More vulnerable. If he was alert, it was for more than rabbits.

He waved and whistled the pig left, up the hill slope. Slut, the pig, was small, black and quick. Men of the Western Kingdoms might use dogs for hunting, but the Gets held to the brighter animals they had used since long before they seized this land. On a thong around his neck Haldane wore an amulet, a boar's tooth marvelously graven, which he prized. He had kept the tooth to remember the boar by and paid for the graving. Grunt, an excellent dog killer.

Slut's trotters dug small divots as she coursed the hill, snout to the ground. She was only a pig for small game, but she loved the hunt. The sight of a strung bow delighted her until she fairly wriggled with pleasure. A beautiful black little darling. Ivory tushed.

A light wind toyed with the grass, the young leaves on the oaks, and the boy's brown hair. The light was starting to fail and the wind to quicken, and Haldane was reluctantly thinking of calling the pig in. It would be dark in little more than an hour. If he were back in sight of the stockade before dark, his father would never hear, but if he had to be looked for, Morca would be told and he would have to take his buffets.

Morca was gone now with a raiding party into Chastain, smallest of the Western Kingdoms. Some two weeks past, Morca had gathered barons and fighting men, lean and restless after a long winter, and led them not for the close and easy border with Palsance across the Trenoth River, but south toward the Nails and Chastain.

Haldane had been left. Haldane had been embarrassed. Haldane had been left. He had the size, the skill. He was ready. He could place arrows with half the party and at worst he could handle a sword better than Hemming Paleface, who was half a Nestorian anyway. Since Morca's departure, Haldane had gone hunting alone every day.

Sometimes Haldane hunted on horse, more often on foot with only a single pig for company. Morca had drawn the limits of Haldane's world exactly. On horse he might ride to the forest verge beyond the village in the valley, the farthest point a man could see clearly from the tower. On foot he might walk to the crest of the first hill. Haldane respected the first rule and was careless of the second. He hunted on foot because it made his small world larger.

He had decided to start for home and was raising his fingers to whistle when Slut stopped abruptly and raised her head. Her ears perked. She strained and trembled, testing the air with her flat pink nose. Haldane lowered his left hand to the bowstring again and drew the arrow back.

Haldane waited. The breeze joined him, holding its breath. The leaves on the oaks hushed to listen. There was no sound, no movement except the suspicious craning of Slut's head. Then Slut slowly trotted forward. In an explosion, not a rabbit, but a hen pheasant, plump, brown and sudden, burst from the grass and rattle-winged toward the oaks.

Fingers tight on familiar leather,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

string pulled taut, and arrow released. A dart speeding to overtake the bird. A good shot, well-aimed. The aspen shaft struck the pheasant like a skewer, and brought it to the ground just inside the verge of the forest.

With suspense ended, the tableau over, the watching world went back to its work. The wind blew coolly, raising goosepimples. The leaves whispered privacies to each other. Slut trotted rapidly after the bird, and Haldane followed down the slope. He was pleased with his shot. He did not enjoy returning to the dun with nothing in his bag. He wished to recover the hen and be on his way. The sooner the better.

Slut passed into the twilight wood, her dark shape merging into the shadows. Haldane followed the sound of her eager grunts, but before he reached the trees, she gave a startled squeal and burst out of the brush. When she reached the protection of his heel, she pressed close and bared her tushes at the wood like a true braveheart.

"On, Slut. Fetch," said Haldane, and waved her toward the wood, but she stayed close. She knew where she wanted to be.

Haldane touched his boar's tooth. He took a last look at the hill, and then set a new arrow to his bowstring. He shivered as he passed between the first trees. It was colder under their dark locked arms. Slut followed, grunting rapid little comments to herself.

His arrow was fletched in brown and white. He saw the feather and then the angled shaft. Haldane glanced quickly at Slut, still close at his heel and then at the pheasant.

It doubled in size and glared at him with eyes like flaring sparks. Haldane drew his bowstring tight. The cat hissed once, leaped sideways and was gone up a tree like a black mystery.

Haldane continued to hold his arrow ready. His heart was racing and there was a trickle of melting snow in his chest. He walked to the arrow. It stood alone among dead leaves. No pheasant and no remains of one. Haldane loosed the tension on his bowstring. He squatted, laid his bow across his knees and pulled the grounded arrow free. There was no trace of blood on shaft or point. He smoothed the feathers and flicked away the crumbs of dirt on the arrowhead. He looked at the tree the cat had climbed and then put the arrow into his quiver.

"Well, boy, did you lose something?"

The voice came from behind him. It was old and it spoke in Nestorian which he had learned from his nurses before he had learned Gettish. He heard only the words, not the language.

Haldane lunged forward, aiming for the cover of the nearest tree. Slut squealed as he half-tripped over her. He lost his balance but kept his forward momentum. He tumbled and rolled, ending behind the tree he had started for. Slut huddled and grunted forgivingly to him.

He skritched her once to calm her fears, but who would do the same for him? He put arrow to string and checked his position. It was only now that he had time to think that he was sure he had been spoken to in Nestorian, the language of cattle, peasants and outlaws. His heart galloped. He felt his horn, which was his from his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grandfather Arngrim, but he would not blow it for help unless he had no other choice. He preferred retreat if it was possible.

The voice laughed. It was old and cracked. He peered cautiously around the tree bole, prepared to jerk his head back. It was no Get-hating Nestorian bandit ready to bury a blade in his back that he saw, but an ancient woman appreciating him and herself.

"Did I frighten you now?" she asked. "I merely wondered if you had lost something."

He started up with the intent of unstringing his bow and thrashing her out of the forest for her laughter. It is no business of slaves to frighten their masters or to wonder overmuch about their affairs. But her figure, by some trick of the eye, suddenly seemed the person of a giant trollmother. Framed by oak she was, with hill and sky behind her, and she leaned heavily on her staff. But when she raised it, thunder threatened. The black cat, smug in its knowledge, sat on its heels by her side. And Haldane was afraid and stopped short.

He recognized her. He had been told of her too often not to know who she was. That was why he was afraid and that was why he stopped short. Since the Battle of Stone Heath, when the unleashed magic of the West had struck the Gets a cruel stroke, lone Gets were wary about thrashing even solitary witches and wizards. They had no wizards of their own and magic was strange and terrifying to them.

The boy was more used to magic than most Gets. He had even learned a small spell, the Pall of Darkness, and had suffered the costs of using it—though all that was behind him now. It did not occur to him to invoke the spell any more than he would have dared to bare a sword in the presence of Black Morca. Indeed, his hand sought the comfort of his boar's tooth, not for the contact with Grunt, but for the securities lent by the gravings, his clan markings.

"That's right," she said, gesturing with the staff. "Come close, boy."

The name of the witch was Jael. She was ugly with her years. Her nose was like a stripped chicken bone, her skin a withered weathered mushroom, and the veins on the back of her hands were as thick and blue as the yarn in Haldane's winter cap. She had been old when Haldane's nurses were virgins, many many years past. But the hair blowing wild about her face and shoulders was blacker than Morca's.

He approached warily. Nestorian though she was, he was ready to be polite. He wanted nothing more than for this moment to be done so that he could be off over the hills, pig at his heels, before light failed. This felt very much like an interview with Morca. His mind was a tortoise, his heart a hare. But he had had practice in hiding his fears.

"Who are you, boy?" she asked.

He lifted his head. With some pride he said, "Haldane, son of Black Morca, King of the Gets."

"Oh," she said. "Yes. I believe idle tongues have wagged somewhat of Morca to me. What do you do here in these woods of mine, walking abroad with only a pig for company?"

"This is Nestor," said Haldane. "The Gets rule in Nestor and Morca

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rules the Gets. This is Morca's land. Why should I not walk abroad?"

"Morca's land, Getling? There were people in Nestor before the Gets were ever heard of. There are people now in Nestor of whom the Gets have never heard. They remain, living in Nestor, and will in that day when the Gets are only a name."

Jael spoke, not with vehemence, but with a simple mocking assurance that disconcerted Haldane.

"A distant day," he said. "We. . ."

"A day soon to come," the witch said. "The Goddess is awake and walks again in the West."

Haldane's hand went back to his gravings. The Gets had left all their familiar gods behind when they first circled out of their high home plains of Shagetai. Here they had no gods to stand with them and they were wary.

"I know no Goddess," he said.

"Never fear, the Goddess will know you, and that is all that is necessary. Her passage shakes the land and her portents are everywhere."

Haldane said, "I know of no portents."

"Have you asked the plain folk? You don't know enough to follow sheep, little one, but you will learn. Haldane Hen-Heart. Haldane Left-Behind. Haldane Dribblenose."

"Those are not my names!"

Slut trembled at his passion. But those were not his names. He had no earburner, for good or ill, except sometimes Haldane Hardhead, because he was stubborn and could take a blow. He didn't really mind that one. But he didn't want these as presents.

"The wake of the Goddess is marked by change. Read the changes in your life, Haldane Libera-Liege, and you will see portents in plenty. The Gets will meet a bloody end on Stone Heath, and you will be the instrument of the Goddess."

Haldane was a free Get, and son of Black Morca. He would be no one's instrument. Who was Libera? The name of a day, the name of a wandering star. But this day was one of Libera's. He was frightened.

"I won't be!"

"You will be! When you are ready, when you are ripe, the Goddess will come and snatch the soul from your body. You are hers to take. Libera—"

She raised her gnarly staff in her gnarly hand and gestured widely so that Haldane's eye was compelled to follow. Her movements were slow and grand. And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, she brought the knobbed end of the staff down with power and precision and rapped Haldane smartly on the noggin. It set him on his heels and flaked a tooth and blurred his vision like wind-ruffled waters.

"I mark you," he heard a distant crabbed voice say. "Libera's liege. Serve her well and faithfully."

"And if you wish a portent to chew on, Haldane Eggsucker, your father awaits you now in his dun. He has brought you a foreign bride to wed."

Haldane blinked to clear his vision. When his eyes were clear again the witch and her cat were vanished, stolen away by magic. The forest was empty.

The trees began cool conversation about the approach of night. Slut whuffled anxiously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

2

THERE WAS BUT ONE road to the top of Morca's Hill. From the point it left the last trees on the far side of the Nestorian village in the valley, through the settled fields and up the hill where nothing taller than a berry bush was allowed to stand, the road ran under the eyes of the tower in the corner of the palisade. Both dun and tower were there before Morca.

It was not because the hill was high and the fort safe that Morca had taken possession of the dun, nor yet for its sweet spring or its closeness to the Western Kingdoms. There were higher safer forts on Breakneck and Crow's Nest and Little Nail, other duns with sweet clear springs, other duns closer to Palsance, Chastain or Vilicea, and he might have had any of them. On Morca's Hill there was room for the largest dun in Nestor, and Morca had plans to extend his walls, plans long-nursed.

Haldane met the road at the hill foot beyond the last field. Only then, in twilight but at last in full sight of the palisade, did he pause for breath. Slut had been pressed hard, poor pig. Her sides were heaving. She had been as anxious as Haldane to be away, even if her reasons were now forgotten. She nosed at his feet and grunted of her bad dreams. Haldane, his reasons better-remembered, looked back at the darkening country and shivered.

He explored the bump on his head with a finger, and he worried the rough edge of his chipped tooth with his tongue. One pain connected the two.

A bloody end on Stone Heath? Stone Heath was long ago when Morca still hung in a cradleboard on his mother's back, before the Gets lived within walls. There wasn't a word that he had heard that he liked, from talk of a Goddess to talk of marriage. He touched the tooth with his fingertip. The finger confirmed what his tongue told him. It was a flake shorter than his other lower front teeth. Hardly a war wound to boast of.

Yes, and Morca home, so the witch had said. He took a deep breath and started up the road to the dun. Slut followed at his heel.

He slowed his pace before he reached the dun. The gate of the stockade stood wide. The men at guard were not the men Haldane had left on watch. Morca was home. The carls at the gate, Morca's men, grinned at Haldane as they saluted him.

"You're home late, fuzzface," old Rolf said. He was still wearing his leather war jerkin, but he vaunted no fresh wounds and he showed more signs of travel than war. Still, as proof of the raid he wore a fork with a bone handle, lashed to his dagger sheath with a piece of light cord so that everyone could see them. "Your command has been lifted, Haldane, and you out walking a pig."

Haldane bid Slut stay. "Does Morca know of your fork, Rolf? Fingers are good enough for you. Fingers are enough for him. He'll make you give it up."

Rolf shook his sturdy head. "Oh, na," he said. "He has a fork of his own now. You should have seen the place we took. Stone walls as thick as a man." He held a hand over his head to indicate the width of the walls. "Forks everywhere. A trayful. Morca said I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could take two if I wanted, since there were so many, but one is enough. My left hand is not so cunning as my right."

The other guard, Hemming Paleface it was, laughed and said, "You'll stab yourself yet, Rolf."

"I'll stab anyone who gets between me and the spit. My arm is too short. If I had a second fork, someone would have it from me in no time, and then where would be my advantage? And admire the cord. Isn't that fine? I think of one use for it and then another. For now, I'll just delight to play with it."

Haldane said, "Take my bow and bag, Rolf?"

"So you can escape Morca's hand? I'm on duty here. I cannot help you. But you are just on our heels. Slide the pig back to the swinery, nip through the back of the hall and meet Morca in the yard tying the strings of your trousers as though fresh come from the outhouse."

Hemming Paleface said, "Any game in your bag? A freshly dressed rabbit would make Morca sweet." He had no wounds to boast of, either.

Haldane had few words to spare for Hemming Paleface, who was not so much older, and not as good with sword or bow, but who was allowed on raids. But he would not appear small, so he forced himself to say, "Nothing. The gods of Nestor were not with me." And winced inwardly as he remembered how much they had been with him.

"No matter," old Rolf said. "We've brought you a sweet little partridge from out of Chastain."

Both carls laughed. Haldane didn't laugh, but he did smile and show them the safe side of his hand, and they returned his salute.

He led Slut by the collar into the courtyard. Truly it seemed he was on the heels of Morca's party. The mud of their tracks had not settled. How had the witch known? How could she have known?

The yard was a tangle of movement. Get barons, those Morca had raised, and their carls. Nestorian serfs. And a party of strangely dressed fighting men standing aloof between a wagon piled high with spoils and a heavy traveling carriage at a lurch in the spring mud. Fighting men with all their weapons. What did Morca have in mind? Who were these armed strangers in his home camp?

Morca himself, the full height of a Western bow and more, dark and hairy, black-bearded, black-visaged, stood by the painted carriage talking to a painted man. A small man, a stranger to Haldane. The mixed colors of his clothes were an offense to Haldane's eye. Haldane had never seen a Western man before, except for Oliver, Morca's wizard, and even Oliver did not dress this way. Oliver wore red, or on great occasions magenta.

The buildings of the dun were set in a hollow square within the larger square of the stockade walls. The stables on one side were large and sturdy. Directly opposite across the yard stood Morca's hall, even more magnificent. It stood a full two stories high, built of great rough-hewn timbers and fronted with a balcony, with room within to hold all of Morca's men. It was a luxurious building, visible sign of Morca's ambition even for those who knew nothing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his plans to enlarge the dun.

Haldane looked one way and then another, the pig he held straining in his grip. Before greeting Morca, he needed to rid himself of all the visibles of his disobedience. He caught the arm of a serf plodding past.

"Here, old man," he said. "Take the pig to the swinery."

"Yes, Lord Haldane."

The serf seized the pig, but Slut was in no mood to be penned. She squealed and tried to wriggle free, but the serf held her by collar and ear.

That was easy enough, but bow, quiver and empty game bag could not be passed like the pig to a Nestorian. To enter the hall unseen, Haldane must do it from the rear. He looked after the old man, dragging the pig away by force of arm.

"Hey, hold," he said. "I have a question."

"Yes, lord?" The old man tried to make his respectful gesture and keep his grip on the pig, and did badly at both.

"I'll walk with you a distance," Haldane said, pointing to the swinery tucked in one corner of the dun out of sight of the courtyard. You'll do better to loose her ear. She doesn't like that."

"Yes, lord."

"What . . . What portents have been seen of late by the *plain folk*?" He used the Nestorian phrase, Jael's phrase, rather than the Gettish word that came most easily: cattle.

"Portents, lord?"

"Signs. Strange occurrences. Omens."

"Omens. It's strange that you should ask of omens, lord. Lon, the son of Witold the Woodcutter, saw a wurox in the forest only two days past. So he says to anyone who will listen."

"Simple Lon? The boy who wets his smock?"

"Ah, well, yes, lord. He does, but he is a good boy. He saw a cow, he says, and he is very positive."

"What is this wurox? Of what is it a portent?" Haldane knew the wurox only as the name of a sky sign. It was no more real to him than that other sky beast, the pard, sacred of Jan.

"Why, lord, it is the wild bull of the woods in all the old stories. Libera's kine. Travelers say they inhabit the great forest beyond Lake Lamorne, but none has been seen here in Nestor since my grandsire's grandsire's time. They drop stones rather than normal turds. I have seen them myself, great stone whorls. But the wuroxen are gone. Until now."

Haldane's tongue went back to his flaked tooth. The edge was rough. That one little tooth edge dominated his mouth.

His heart in arrest, he said, "Does this mean that Libera is here in Nestor?"

The old man sucked his breath and nearly lost his grip on Slut. "I hope not," he said. "Veton preserve us."

He meant Veton preserve himself, for Veton was his god, and not Haldane's. Haldane had seen the old serf often enough standing in his gardens, sharing his wine with Veton, a great swallow for himself, a dollop on the earth for the god.

They reached the swinery and the swineherd came hurrying out to take the pig.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Haldane said, "If these wuroxen have not been seen in living time, how comes Simple Lon to know one?"

"Why, Lord Haldane, I've never seen a wurox and I would know one. They shit stones, as I told you. I've never seen the great bird of the sea with a wingspan twice your father's height, but I would know it if I saw it. Wouldn't you?"

"I suppose I would," said Haldane.

Haldane's attention was taken by the approach of a bearded barefoot man of middle years, short, stout and wrapped in a red robe. His name was Oliver. He was the only wizard in all of Nestor, one of Morca's luxuries, evidence of Morca's ambition. Great kings keep wizards. Morca kept a wizard. He slicked and slid his way over the rain-muddied ground from the weathered board steps at the rear of Morca's hall. It was usually muddy there. No shoon and his woolen red robe billowing about bare shanks. That mud would be cold between his toes and he made no practice of cultivating discomfort. His spells and experiments made sufficient demand on his health without him courting indisposition, he would say, often said, and he did his best to keep his feet dry and his belly full. He didn't fight, either.

Oliver hailed Haldane and danced to spare his feet contact with the mud. His unbelted robe had the appearance of a flapping half-pitched tent. In the usual way of things, his feet were shod, his robes were in place, his pockets were full of secrets and his head full of answers beyond Haldane's patience to bear. At the moment, however, nothing was in place.

He said, "Your father wishes your immediate presence. He is holding me accountable for your coming. They arrived in a sudden hour," he said, to explain the self-evident.

The boy wasn't sure how much he liked Oliver, who wouldn't fight. He thought of leaving him floundering there while he passed through the hall, dropping bow, arrows and bag, and found his father by himself. At last, however, he hooked his bow over his shoulder the way Morca had taught him to carry it, and said, "Let us go to my father."

He had an automatic clout to take, Morca's price for disobedience, but he was ready for it. He had bargained for as much, slipping away to hunt alone, but his head had already been broken once today and still ached. He touched his chipped tooth with his tongue and his boar's tush with thumb and forefinger, and he shivered.

"Is all well with you?" Oliver asked.

"Just the evening breeze," Haldane said. "I wonder that you don't feel it, Oliver."

"I do," said Oliver. "Let us get out of the wind." And he pulled his robe into an imitation of order and tied the belt.

As they passed between buildings into the courtyard Haldane said, "Who are these strangers?"

"Have you no eye for panoply? A Get raider should be able to gauge wealth and value like a clerk lest he fetch trash. You have much to learn. Your father has for company Lothor of Chastain."

"A King of the West here? In the land of the Gets? Why not be satisfied with his head?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ah, as to that, I cannot say. I was in my cell collecting my thoughts for an hour or two when your father arrived so suddenly. He sent no messengers to warn of his coming, and in these minutes he hasn't seen fit to take me aside for consultation. Perhaps he intends to roast Lothor for the company and wished to keep the meat fresh. Proper spits are not easily found in Chastain, so there was nothing to do but bring him home."

If Haldane disliked Oliver, it was in large part for his tongue which could deal blows no man in Morca's Dun could ward, save only Morca—who was only rarely put to the test. Men were wary of the wizard.

Oliver had appeared suddenly out of the West with an eye to his backtrail when Haldane was only a boy and entered Morca's service, valued as much for his tongue as for his magic—as long as Morca was not put to the test too often. And he was not, for if Morca had use for a sharp-tongued wizard, Oliver had need of protection. He had been a younger son, and then a younger brother, his family of some power in Palsance, and he had filled his days with magic and other study. His pride being great, he had allowed himself enemies to match, until at last he had aimed a successful spell at too great and powerful an enemy and found his overmatch, not in magic, but in politics, and been forced to flee.

He told the story well, leaving the best parts to the imagination, and he told it rarely enough that it kept its flavor. Haldane had heard it only twice from Oliver, though other men might tell it more often. Oliver never named his enemy, but men around their campfires who claimed to know spoke of the childlessness of Richard, King of Palsance, and nodded.

In other days, Haldane had been in closer company with Oliver than he was wont to be now and liked him better. Not at first, of course. Oliver was far from Haldane's idea of what a Get should be—he was not Black Morca. He was a left-behind, a member of the train with the women and children, no fighting man, but only a counselor, and content to be; a strange, plump, remote figure, a men who wore glass in front of his eyes to help him to read his book. And then, when Haldane was twelve, Morca informed him that he was to be placed in Oliver's hands to learn letters and number, magical figures on paper that no self-respecting Get would know. Haldane naturally resisted the idea. Black Morca was Black Morca without knowledge of these cabalisms.

Haldane said as much. A solid thumping—how else are impressions to be made?—altered his thinking.

"Learn," Morca said. "Train your arm. Train your eye. Train your wits. A king must be more than other men."

A king—Haldane a king? It was a new idea, a new possibility. Morca's father, Garmund, and his uncle, Garulf, who had died leading the Gets at Stone Heath, had each been war King of the Gets in his own time, but this was not the West where crowns were inherited. Among the Gets the strongest baron was king, and if there was any lesson Haldane had learned, any one thing that Black Morca had impressed upon him, it was that he was not the man his father was. Haldane a king? Was it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

possible?

And so into Oliver's hands he went and learned to read and cipher, and it was a strange, exhilarating world he found there far outside the ken of any man in Morca's Dun, a world that could be shared with no one but Oliver. Oliver talked of Palsance and the great tourneys held under the eye of King Richard at the stone castle of Fomoria on Clear Lake where the best and strongest were given bid to enter Richard's service and stand behind him to face the threat of the Gets. Haldane laughed at that. The fighting men of Palsance were butter to Morca's knife.

Oliver spoke of the trading ships of Vilicea with their sails of blue and red and white, coursing the Bay of Whales to Grelland in the north, faring south along the Brenadine Coast of Palsance where the old mountain trees stand high, narrow and naked with strange scales for bark, hoving round South Cape to the Isle of Orkay and to Jedburke in Pellardy that paid tribute to the Gets. And he spoke of the dead and wasted ruins of Nestria at the mouth of the Blackstone, the old city of the Kings in the West, the legend of which was so powerful that it had carried even to the far high plains of Shagetai.

"And you saw this yourself?" Haldane asked. "I thought the city of Nestria was only a story."

"And the Three Kings, too?" Oliver asked gently. "No, little one. I myself have walked the broken streets of Nestria and seen the monkeys at play on the toppled statues of the Three Kings. All that remains of the old glory is bare ruin and empty desolation. There is a mindless village tucked up against the last standing wall of the city and barefoot boys shy stones at the head of Leonidus, the Poet King. His bust has had five hundred years of the abuse he merited in life. Remember that, and leave no statues. Or rule well."

"I'll waste no time in making poems," Haldane said. But in his secret heart he was pleased that Oliver should recognize the stuff of kings in him. It made him feel that it might really be there.

So, in time, as he learned, he and Oliver came as close to being friends as a wizard and a boy can. Not truly friends, but they might talk to each other when there was no one else.

And then Oliver began to teach Haldane magic. Not the magic of simple figures reeling in the dance of multiplication and division. Not the magic of words on paper that could bring the dead voice of Leonidus, more poet than king, to life again after these five hundred years. True magic. The Pall of Darkness.

Haldane had balked. Haldane had questioned. But Oliver said, "Did your father not put you into my hands to learn? The things I have to teach you can serve a king as well as any man. The things I have to teach may serve a king better than other men."

So Haldane had followed Oliver. He learned the signs of hand and the words, nervous all the while, fearing, uncertain, unsteady. And failed, as magic will fail those who fail magic.

And he tried again, until at last once and then twice he pulled the cold curtain of night over himself while the sun

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still held the day. His touch was uncertain—the second time the spell succeeded, the veil of invisibility covered Oliver as well as himself. His count was slow and far from smooth. And yet, the spell did work.

Nonetheless, he felt he was doing wrong. Arms, not magic were the Gettish way. Force of arm was clean and honest, the mark of the superior, the road of those who rule. Spells and sorcery were the dirty tricks of the weaklings of the West, the cowards who had struck from secret at Stone Heath.

Fortunately for his peace of mind, the aftermath of the spell was nausea and weakness. Magic always exacts a price from those who woo her, a bride price: blood, weakness, disease, and even death for power. And the day following his successes, Haldane was too weak to swing his sword or sit his horse under Morca's eye.

"What's the matter, boy?" asked Morca. "You fail and faint."

"Nothing," said Haldane. "The sun is too hot. It makes me dizzy."

Morca shook his head, but then he said, "Rest under the tree until your head returns."

But the sky filled with clouds and Haldane's weakness did not pass and the story came out. Morca's anger darked the day more than any spell and his fists blacked both Haldane's eyes and left him sore as well as weak. Morca's temper was a well-used tool, but Haldane never saw him angrier than at that moment when he left the boy in a heap beaten and went to search out Oliver. What passed between Morca and the wizard, Haldane had never learned, but he was taken forever from Oliver's hands and after that, for the first time, Oliver's sharpness began to be directed at him as much as any other man. After that, they were no longer friends.

There was compensation of a sort. From that day, Morca publicly called Haldane his lieutenant, his second. It was a good name and it filled Haldane with pride, until he found it hollow, a word without power. Hemming Paleface knew how much it meant. Nothing. Morca might say once and again that he left Haldane in command, but when he raided, he raided without him. Even when he promised, swearing before men, swearing lightly, he raided into Chastain without Haldane.

Now, as he and Oliver walked past the great hall into the tangle of the courtyard to face Morca returned from Chastain, as the witch had said, Haldane tried questions in his mind.

He craved answers, but he would not say too much, not to Oliver. He would not tell Oliver of the witch's words: nothing of portents or Stone Heath, or a foreign bride, or his soul, his, Haldane's, torn from his body by this Goddess, this Libera. But in this moment when he could ask, he must have at least one answer.

They passed the high loaded wagon with heavy carved doors lashed one to a side like elaborate shields. Morca had been looking for a proper set of doors for two years.

Haldane shot a look at the huddle of foreign men out of Chastain and then he asked, "Does magic cost a witch pain?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

3

THE MEN of Chastain they paused near were a lean lot, leaner than Haldane, though Haldane was lean for a Get. Their hair was of an unmanly length, and though they wore their weapons well-displayed, it was all in show because they gave Haldane and Oliver ground. They burdened themselves in hauberks of chain mail, shoulder to knee, and they held their helmets by the noseguards like clumsy bludgeons or tucked them under their arms like men waiting their turn to bowl at the jackstone. Haldane wondered if they would flee in a herd if he stamped his foot.

Oliver looked at Haldane. These days he must even look up. No apparent matter to him that with the parting of the men of Chastain, they were in sight of Black Morca.

"Magic always takes its price without exception," Oliver said. "It is the one thing I know about magic. What commerce would you have with witches? Do you seek a new tutor?"

"No!" said Haldane. "I saw the old witch Jael in the woods as I hunted today. She made a pheasant for my arrow with magic, and then laughed. And she disappeared before me with the aid of a spell like your Pall of Darkness, but other. I wished to know if her tricks cost her pain."

"Ah, no doubt," said Oliver. His beard was white and cropped to the outline of his face. His lip and cheeks were bare and ruddy. His hair was gray and wild. He ran his hand through his hair and left it wilder. "But I wonder their meaning. Did she speak?"

"She laughed," Haldane said.

"It must have been to hide her pain," said Oliver. It was his way of closing the question. He indicated Morca with a lift of his chin and a wag of his beard. "Your father waits."

Serfs began to light the courtyard torches against the darkness. Odo the Steward directed hands to the unloading of the high-piled wagon. Odo sent a serving woman across the muddy yard to show the knights of Chastain to their quarters. The gates of the dun were swung shut, a solid door for the wild night to rap at for entry.

As Oliver and Haldane approached, Morca caught sight of them. He pushed past the painted man, raising an arm. Morca was a dark, overpowering giant. He had charm and a rude wit, but lacked grace. His subtleties were crude, and even his whispers were loud. His hand was heavy.

His son was little like him, except perhaps in owning wit and lacking subtlety, but he would never be as obvious a presence, never as tall, never as strong, never as whelming. Haldane's hair was a neutral brown. Morca's was a black and curly bush. Morca's hand could cover and hold Haldane's two fists.

Haldane readied to take his blow, but Morca swung his arm around his son's shoulders and pulled him close, saying, "Hey, Lothor. Here is Haldane, my son and second. My little brown bull to match your little brown heifer. Bring your daughter out and we'll introduce them. Introductions before weddings, hey?"

Haldane was staggered by the blow that did not fall. His heart was felled by the words that followed. Morca was in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his gay and unpredictable mood. He was manic in his half-played game. What now? The witch's sight had been true—Morca's return had brought change indeed. Was he then to be Libera's brown bull, her wurox? Was he to be dumb-eyed sacrifice to a goddess he had asked nothing of? He felt himself a helpless handtossed die, spun for other's pleasure. At that moment, for that moment, he wished to be simple. He wished to be nothing, almost nothing—a housecarl. Still a Get, but not a king.

Lothor tugged his cloak into place as though Morca had set it awry with his violence. He held a brown-and-white dog, as neat and small as a puppy. His hair was white to his shoulders and he wore a fur cap a-jaunt. He wore tight hose and he stood on heels strapped to pattens to keep him above the mud. He on his heels and Oliver in his bare feet in the mud were much of a height.

He said, "In Chastain, only one of equal rank would presume to ask to be presented. Marriage is hardly sufficient excuse. But since you were willing to forgo your long-tried Gettish customs in favor of ours in the matter of a dowry, I suppose we must be equally civil."

He was no older than Morca, but he seemed older. His days as a leader of fighting men, if ever they existed, must have been early and brief. His voice was boyish thin, his face was paled with powder and brightened with rouge, and he carried a dog—and who would follow a man like that?

His traveling carriage was decorated in strong shades of yellow and red, and the drawn leather curtains that masked the interior were painted with gilt flowers. Lothor tapped at the door of the carriage with the head of his scepter, his thin stick of power.

"Marthe," he said, "you must come out now."

He spoke of matters beyond Haldane's knowledge. His tongue was a twisted Nestorian that had more in common with the difficult language of Leonidus, the Poet King, five hundred years dead, than with the country speech, plain and simple, of the boy's nurses or with the Western speech Oliver had brought with him out of Palsance. Still, Haldane understood him. His tone was clear if his words were not.

Lothor must surely be a king. Morca did not bother to understand him, as he would have understood any lesser man. The dog watched all, silent but eager.

The door of the carriage opened and a girl, a woman, a princess, Lothor's little brown heifer, stepped down into the mud of the yard with some difficulty. It was impossible to tell if her clumsiness was the result of shoes raised and protected like her father's. Her great dress of white and gold hid her feet. The heavy sleeves of the dress were a series of puffs and every puff wore a modest skirt of its own. Her face, underneath her broadbrimmed hat, was unappealing, sour and painted.

"Odo!" Morca bawled, calling like a herdsman, as she stepped to the ground.

She flinched at the roar of it and seemed to teeter, and was steadied by her father's hand.

Odo the Steward, the Nestorian of highest rank in Morca's service, who

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might even order housecarls to come, go or stay, ceased his directions and overseeing as he heard his master call. His exhortations and movements of hand were no more needed than sideline signals to a squad of well-drilled horse on parade. The work continued smoothly without him as he came off the porch of Morca's hall and out into the yard.

"Yes, Lord Morca?"

"Unload the carriage," Morca called. "It is empty now." He turned back to Lothor. "Ha. I said if breakfast was early and cold, we should make our dinner here in the comfort of home."

Odo began to draft serfs from the earnest ant line waiting to carry away what was handed from the wagon of spoils to Morca's storehouse within. Or was the wagon the dowry Lothor had spoken of? Trust Morca. For years, until men had drifted back to calling him Black Morca, he had been known as Morca Bride-stealer, the man who paid no bride price. In these days, unlike the better ones of old, the name was no sully. Men had laughed and leapt to follow him.

The serfs hurried to the carriage. One bounded up a-top and began to unstrap royal baggage.

Haldane studied the girl. His bride? Her hair under the hat was some shade of brown and pinned in draping curls. In this light, that was all that could be said. Her nose was long and straight and her face was round. He thought she must be older than he, all of twenty or more. And stunted, shorter than her father. Shorter than the Nestorian women he knew best, the nurses, serving maids and cooks of the dun, or those he saw in the villages. Shorter than Get women, though he knew none of these, never having traveled, except once to his grandfather's when he was a child, and it being Morca's rule that men might marry but that married men might not serve within his walls. But the Get women of his mind and the Get women of his memory were taller than this.

The boy thought though he might marry this princess of Chastain, he wouldn't like her. He would close her away in a tight room and turn his back on the door. She deserved no better, and she would get from him only what she deserved. Men might see him with her and laugh.

Morca said, "This is Lothor of Chastain. The king. And this is his daugh. . ."

"No, no," said Lothor, changing the lapdog to his other arm, "Let me make the introductions. This gaping lurdane, my dear, is your husband to be. Haldane, the son of Black Morca. My youngest daughter, the Princess Marthe, the spring of my old age. You are not fit to lay eyes upon her, but I grace you with her hand. I do not know this barefoot man."

"Embrace her, boy," said Morca. "This is Oliver, my maker of magic. Oliver from the Hook of Palsance. Did you know I had a wizard? Would you care to try his skill?"

Lothor said, "It is a large place to be from. And the name is unknown to me. Call him wizard if you like. We have no barefoot wizards in the Western Kingdams."

"Embrace her, boy," said Morca in Nestorian.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But she's painted," Haldane said. He spoke in Gettish.

"Embrace her. You can wipe it off after."

Oliver stood silent. He did not speak to Lothor, but stood toes a-squelch in the mud and looked steadily at him, as though his sheer presence spoke against all doubts. Men here knew him if Lothor did not.

At his father's continued urging, Haldane finally stepped forward and put his arms around the stranger princess. The material of her dress was a thick rich brocade, stiff and heavy under his hands. She must have been a-teeter on pattens because he threw her off balance and only saved her from falling by seizing her shoulders. She pressed at him to be free and, balancing, struck at him, knocking his bow off his shoulder so that it hung at his elbow by the string.

"Don't touch me," she said. "You have grimed and soiled my dress. Do you understand Nestorian?"

"My little bull," said Morca.

"I'll teach her to speak Gettish," said Haldane. Speaking Gettish.

"Let us go in," said Morca. "At dinner, I'll have Oliver prove his magic for you. An Ultimate Spell, if you are willing to try your courage. Stone Heath in reverse."

"If you have so many wizards to spare," said Lothor.

"Wizards are of nature economical," said Oliver. "We suit the size of our spells to the occasion. We do not waste ourselves idly. But tonight I will show you magic."

"Odo!" Morca called. "Show King Lothor and Princess Marthe to their apartments. We meet at dinner, Lothor. Bring your fork."

"And you bring yours," said Lothor.

"I will. I will." And Morca held his new fork high, finer than Rolf the carl's, and he waved it. As he saw Lothor and Marthe led away, he said, "Come, you two. Follow me to my rooms. We will talk before dinner."

4

MORCA LED THE WAY to the hall followed by Oliver at one heel and Haldane at the other. Within his dun, Black Morca was first. That is what it means to rule. Morca was never late. Other men clocked themselves by him and nothing began until he gave signal. Whatever he commanded was done. Whatever he chose to want was his. He was served first and ate sweetest. When he walked, he was followed. Where he walked, way was made.

A careless serf, too intent on the heavy brassbound chest he helped to bear to realize his mistake, stepped backwards onto the portico and into Morca's path. Morca informed him of his error with a casual backhand blow that separated him from the chest and sent him tripping over his feet and into the wall. The chest became too much for the other man and he was jerked forward. He dropped the chest and it landed on his toes sending him into a painful dance.

All laughed at the joke but Morca, who was content to grin hugely. Once when he was drunk, Morca had won a bet by breaking a door with a slack serf, a dropper of food and spiller of ale, lifting the Nestorian in his two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hands and carrying him forward like a lance as he yelled his slogan, "*Alf Morca Gettha*!" The serf was broken as well as the door. Men still marveled at the thickness of wood that was smashed and the proofs of Morca's strength.

Morca said to the serf he had struck, "You'll never rise to serve within the hall if you continue clumsy."

"Your pardon, master," said the serf, first in Nestorian and then again in rude Gettish. "Please."

Odo the Steward rushed past them and began to strike the man. "Is this the way you see your lord home? There will be no meat for you tonight."

Odo looked to Morca for approval. He was still beating the shrinking serf when Morca, Oliver and Haldane passed inside the hall.

After the cool evening air; the main room of the hall was warm: There were fires in both fireplaces and the air was moist and heavy with the odors of dinner seeping through from the kitchens behind the dais. Arrases, some of Gettish fashioning, some taken from the West, hung before all the walls and kept the warmth and homey smells well-contained within the room.

The great dinner boards were being unstacked and laid across their trestles to make tables for the company. Barons joined with carls to make light of the work. It was honest work for a man to do. With Morca gone, three tables had been sufficient to serve the dun, and with so few to sleep in the hall, the tables had never been struck.

The three tables had already been increased to five and more were being laid. The benches were being carried into place. There was but one chair within the room and it was Morca's. It stood behind the main table in the center of the dais, solid, great and heavy, as tall as Morca and wide enough to seat two ordinary men. Morca's father, Garmund, had seen it one year in the West, known it as better than his own, and returned for it the next summer with a wagon and the strength to take it away.

"Hey, by damn, when do we eat?" asked Morca, his voice filling the room.

"Within the hour, Lord Morca."

"Ale for all. Let's have the dirt well-washed from our throats. A good raid deserves a good end."

"What about our guests?" called a baron, raising laughter.

"Send them all the water they will drink," said Morca. "I'll have my ale upstairs."

He took the stairs by the wall to his rooms above, followed by Oliver and Haldane. No Get was allowed above except at Morca's bidding, and no one at all was allowed to walk the upper porch above the portico but Morca. His wife had had permission while yet she lived, but since her fall and death, no one.

At the head of the stairs, sitting on a three-legged stool, was an old man, the oldest man within the dun. His name was Svein. He was one of the few who had been a man at Stone Heath and lived, one of the very few who yet lived these many years later. As his proof of the battle he carried a red lightning scar on his right cheek. For as long as the boy could remember, his hair had been white, but in other days he had been known as Svein Half-White Half-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Right. He had served as Lore Master for Garmund, remembering the old ways, the songs, the stories, the sayings, the wisdom the Gets had brought west to Nestor, and applying them to these new times and new ways. Now he sat his stool before Morca's door, guarding the stair in Morca's absence and remembering for himself all the things that younger men did not care to know. He rose when he saw Morca.

"Woe," he said. "Woe to you, Morca. You overreach yourself. You wish to be king in more than war. You would turn Nestor into the fourth Kingdom of the West. Your father was a good king, a right and proper king. He held to the old ways and bowed to the will of his peers."

It was the sort of thing he was wont to say. As the last of those at Stone Heath, he was allowed by Morca to say what he would, however rude, however contrary. Morca had that much respect for the old ways.

"Have you been downstairs again?" Morca asked.

"No, I have not," the old man said and plunked back onto his stool. "I have no need. I've been sitting my stool and minding my business as I should, but I can hear of your alliance to Chastain well enough from here. What your father would have thought!" Svein pointed an accusing finger at Oliver. "It is his fault. You were a good boy until he came and now he has filled your head with gross ambitions. Garulf overrode the word of his barons and bought the Gets Stone Heath. What will your appetites buy?"

Morca said, "Be at peace, old man. You excite yourself. Sit your stool and watch my door well. When my ale comes, pass it through. There is ale for you, too, if your watch is good and your tongue ceases its flap."

"There is?" Svein rose and went trotting halfway down the stair. "Ale," he called. "Ale for me. Morca said I might have ale."

A fire had been laid and started on Morca's arrival. Nestorian serfs might pass within the room under Svein's watchful eye to do their work and leave again. The rules did not apply to them since they were not people. The stair was the distance between Morca and lesser Gets, but the distance between any Get and the Nestorians who served them was so great and obvious that it needed no emphasis.

Haldane sat him down by the fire on a three-legged stool the match of Svein's. Oliver closed the heavy door on the din from belowstairs.

Morca said, "Woe, woe, woe. It is all he can say. He eats and shits and sits his stool now in Nestor, but his mind dwells in Shagetai that we left fifty years before he was born. If it weren't for the respect I bear my father, I would cut his throat. That is a sense of tradition for you. I'm an old-fashioned man and he gives me no credit for it."

"You're a generous man, Morca," Oliver said. "If the world only knew. But what will your peers make of this marriage? You said nothing of this before you left. If you had told me what you intended, I would have advised against it."

"I know," said Morca. "That is why I did not tell you. That is why I am a king and you a wizard whose spells of occasion fail. I dare. You do not. I have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no peers. I am king here and I will act the king. That is why you sought me out. Do you remember? With what other man among the Gets could you dare to practice your art?"

"None other. But I wish to practice it longer. I am your man, Morca, but what good is my advice to you if you will not hear what you have no wish to hear?"

"I will not be told what I cannot do! Study your book and be prepared to help me hold what I have taken. That is your business."

Oliver pointed at Haldane who was sitting by the fire, hands clasped, elbows on knees, listening tight to every word. His head did not move, but his eyes flicked from one to the other.

"You make the boy your pawn," Oliver said.

"That is his part. He is a pawn as I am a king and you a wizard. But he is a pawn who will be made into a king."

"Tell him of your intent. Let him know what risks he runs."

There was a knock then at the door and Morca crossed to open it. It was a serf bearing Morca's ale. Morca took pitcher and leather jack and bade the man wait outside for further call.

Oliver moved toward the door as Morca turned.

Oliver said, "Did you know that the witch Jael was seen in the woods today? Where she appears, trouble trails after. She is a bad omen. Kings and witches—too much power stirs about us. I will study my gramarie as you suggest. It may yet take an Ultimate Spell to keep what you are taking."

He closed the door behind him. Morca looked after him and shook his head. It was his bad habit to speak of others when they were not present.

"He frets too much," he said. "He lacks guts. He doesn't do, he dances. Give him a sword and a man to kill, and he would wash his hands."

Morca poured ale from pitcher to tankard and took the whole in one draft as he crossed the room. He set jack and pitcher down on the table that stood in one corner, swiped his beard, then turned and belted his son with the same backhand blow he had shown the serf. Haldane was knocked from his stool and stretched at his length upon the floor.

Morca shook an admonishing finger at him. "That will teach you to listen and mind. You are a pawn. Mine. Learn to do as you are told."

Haldane nursed his head. One blow added to another, and now he had a headache, a throbbing pain behind his right eye. The blow had come when he had ceased to expect it and he had been unprepared. He picked himself up from the floor and took his seat again, sitting silently, shaking his head to clear it, ceasing to touch it, doing his best to ignore the pain he'd earned.

He didn't grudge Morca the blow, for why should he? It was Morca's right. It was merely unexpected. The blow was far from the first he had taken, and he thought it fairly purchased. It was the price of hunting alone.

But then in an outrush, he let his reasons go. "You promised in the fall that I should ride on the first spring reiving! When will you count me man enough? I was called Haldane Left-Behind today. Men begin to laugh at me, and yet I can outdo Hemming Paleface.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Why should he go and not me? I begin to envy men their scars. When the carls return I look to see their fresh-won honors."

And then Morca began to speak in a tone new to Haldane and Haldane could only stare up at him in wonder. Marca was a man who could no more easily call Haldane "Son" than Haldane could call him "Father". He was as bluff and rough in private as he was in public. This was the boy's secret and he told no one. He would pretend otherwise. Even in that moment when Morca had first called Haldane his lieutenant, he had been rough and bluff.

But now he said in a softer voice than Haldane had ever heard, "I know. I know. You shall have scars enough before I am done making you. But you must have patience. You are man enough to be left in charge. You are my reserve, as Garmund was Garulf's reserve at Stone Heath, and Garmund became king. Would you have me waste you lightly, boy?"

He clapped Haldane on the shoulder. "You are my strength. Without you, all my plans come to nothing. I need you. I would not use you too soon and lose you."

"But I am strong now," said Haldane. "Use me." But his heart was trembling on the edge of the jump to jubilation.

Morca said, "I do owe you a reiving. And you shall have it. It is time for you to prove yourself." He put his hand almost tenderly on Haldane's biceps and tested the muscle. "My son. Be all that I need you to be." His voice was intense.

Haldane could only look at him, Morca, the distant dominating sun he followed, who ordered and denied, and numbly say, "I will." He was too filled to say more. His head was spinning. Morca was admitting of a need for him.

Then abruptly, as though the intimacy were too much for him, Morca rose and turned to the table where stood his pitcher and jack. He did not break away completely, but he poured and finished his second tankard and then stood about patting himself on the stomach until he delivered a satisfactory belch, and only then did he speak again and it was in his customary hearty voice or something like it.

"It was a beautiful raid," he said. "Oh, it was fine. If Richard of Palsance were as simple as Lothor of Chastain, the West would lie open to any man's hand. There would be no need to draw the barons together behind me as one. Anyone could rape the West."

"And you would raise the barons? All the barons as in the old days?"

Haldane might well ask. Since the Gets had recoiled into Nestor to rule there after Stone Heath, the barons had been united in nothing. They had been arrogant, grasping, quarrelsome, careless of law, unmindful of clan, jealous of privilege, and unruled.

"What do you think a King of the Gets should be?" Morca asked.

"Leader of the Gets in war."

That was the simple, well-known answer, Svein's answer. Morca said as much. "These are new and modern times. We are no longer in Shagetai. What was does not rule what might be. I will rule the barons in peace as in war. I shall lead those that can be led. I shall inspire those who would be inspired. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shall beat those who must be beaten. And when I am ready, I mean to take the West. All the West, from South Cape to the Hook, Chastain and Palsance and Vilicea. From Orkay to Grelland. From Lake Lamorne to the sea."

If Haldane was one of those who must be inspired, truly this was inspiring talk. It filled him with visions of Morca leading a great army into the West with Haldane at his right hand. He watched Morca in awe as he spelled out his full flashing vision.

"King of the Gets?" asked Morca. "Why not King of the Get Empire, master of greater territory than the Empire of Nestria ever knew? Why not all the world if a man can seize it?"

The Morca that Haldane knew did not like questions he could not answer. Haldane risked a blow to ask, "What of the wizards of the West?"

Morca waved the question aside as of no importance. "What of them?" he asked, roaring on. "They are dead. They died at Stone Heath and those that are left are small men, more theoretic than our Oliver, whom I can provoke to perform. Why else should I tolerate a man of magic? We were too weak to take the West after Stone Heath and the West lay helpless, too weak to defend itself. In our weakness, we did nothing. In their weakness, they survived. Our weakness is now strength—we have a new generation of Get fighting men. What does the West have? Still nothing. Lothor thought himself safe behind his mountains and his guarded passes. We spent a week crossing through snow and high rock on our mission of state, and Lothor still wonders from where we came. Give me an army and the West is mine. And yours after me."

Morca paused, for the moment talked to an end. He poured the last of the pitcher of ale into his leather cup, sipped and looked upon Haldane to gauge the effect of his words.

Haldane jumped up and seized Morca by the sleeve. "Call the Storthing together," he said in excitement. "Please, Father, tonight. Let us raise the barons and go take the West!"

There had been no Storthing in Haldane's lifetime, none since Morca's election as King of the Gets. That gathering had been marked by quarrels and blood and Morca had prevailed only with the aid of his good friend Arngrim, who had been lieutenant to Garmund, though barely older than Morca. That was before Morca had taken Arngrim's daughter Freda and paid no bride price for her, opening a breach that had taken years to heal. In the meantime, though parties to this quarrel and that had changed and changed again, the quarrels had hardly grown fewer.

Morca pushed the boy away with his great hand, forcing Haldane to loose his fierce grip. Morca's cup was never in danger.

"Not yet," said Morca. "Not yet, but soon. I will call the Storthing when I command the barons. If I am to hold the West, the Gets must be united behind me. I will have my homage. I am not nice about the reasons. I will have some through love and some through lealty, some by command of their land or life. But I will have my grip."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And he finished his cup and the last of the ale. As though his habits were well-known and taken into account, which they were, the door opened and the serf outside announced that Morca's dinner was served. While he stood with his hand to the door, the serf was brushed aside by Svein come pellmelling up the stairs.

"I heard them talking," Svein said. "That Princess Marthe is in the hall with her father. She expects to eat at the High Table. No one knows what to say."

Morca's table and dun were celibate, it being Morca's rule that no man should keep what Morca did not. Those of Morca's men who cared to marry were encouraged to establish steads of their own under Morca's protection.

Morca said, "Go down and tell them that the girl is to be served privately in her rooms. The custom of my hall is not to be disturbed. Call me for dinner when all is settled."

Svein turned and went out with a glancing look at the serf at the door. In the old days before there were serfs, a Get carl did his own labor and was proud. Svein was proud.

Haldane said, "When you speak from the balcony before a raid, you alway say that women are to be taken where they are found and not dragged back to the dun. Do you intend to send this woman and me out to start our own homestead, our own dun?"

"What is a custom in the face of an opportunity?" said Morca. By damn, you have no sense! This marriage is part of my brightest planning. Men will follow you. They like the thought of long tradition. You there, Rab," he said to the serf holding the door open yet. "If you were a Get would you follow Lord Haldane and Princess Marthe?"

The serf nodded, "Oh yes, master, I would. Yes."

"See, and thus with many. If I had not made a vow to your mother never to take another woman, I would marry the girl myself. A daughter of the line of Chastain and Nestria mated to the ruler of the Gets. It is an epic."

"The woman is painted."

"Her age washes off. She is but fourteen. She has more spirit than you might think. She threatened to kill me at first. And listen to the roar she is causing. Your mother tried to kill me four times before we came to terms. See the girl tomorrow. You may find you like her better. And if you don't, we have rooms enough to keep her in. The story needn't suffer. Come along, boy. Let us go down for dinner."

Before they were out the door, Morca said, "If I had only known before the softness of Chastain, I would not have spent these many years in wading the Great Slough and other adventures. When Lothor is well-returned to Dunbar, you and I will rape an estate or two in Chastain. Mind you, we won't tell the girl. We'll spare her feelings."

Morca started forward down the stair calling, "Remove the girl. It is my order, Lothor."

Haldane followed at a slower pace. His tongue touched his chipped tooth and he shivered and wasn't quite sure why.

5

HALDANE WAS EXUBERANT in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

morning. Far out of sight of Morca's dun and Morca's tower, far beyond the huddled Nestorian village and the edge of the wood, Haldane galloped the cool forest avenue alone. He was loosed from all the limits and responsibility he had suffered in Morca's absence, and he recked for nothing. He felt like a true Get again.

The mist that had held the dun when he left that morning had been blown away. As he rode the natural lane, the wind nipped the boy's back and harried him onward. His horse drummed the mold and his heart raced to the drum beat. He could not be slowed. He could not be stayed. He ducked the reaching branches that lined the forest gallery as though they were enemy broadswords slicing over his saddlebow and laughed though he lost his head fully five times to the cold wet kiss of steel.

Hemming Paleface, his guard and companion, sent by Morca to heel after Haldane, lay lost somewhere on the turning Pellardy Road behind him, unable to stand the pace. He had called to halt, to slack a little, but Haldane had not heeded. Why should he? Let Hemming explain to Morca why he could not keep up to a proper Gettish pace. If Morca would listen. Haldane could keep up.

Once again, Haldane saw himself riding beside Morca, leading the Gets into the West. Being Gets as Gets should be, bleeding and being bled, trading blow for blow, squeezing the throat of the world in a hand. No, not at Morca's elbow. Morca at the head of one army, he at the head of another—Morca's reserve. Vaulting the Trenoth River into Palsance, overspreading the West.

But this beautiful vision was spoiled by a thought. Suddenly looming in front of the progress of his armies was a plain. The boy had never seen the plain, but he knew it instantly. It was Stone Heath. Stone Heath lay in Palsance on the other side of the Trenoth River. Out of the stories of his childhood, he had conjured a picture of the place in his mind. It was an open landscape, a series of plains and cliffs, carelessly bestrewn with great rocks shaped like eggs and lit by wild and dangerous lightnings under black clouds. It was a deserted place of death and danger. And in Haldane's mind the two armies, Morca's and his, galloped headlong down onto the plain and disappeared into a sudden crevasse.

Haldane's gelding swerved at a bridle tug, but it served no purpose to dodge destiny. The army in his mind was gone and the plain stood empty under deathly skies. Haldane was abruptly sobered and drew rein. He looked to see if he were watched. If he had seen outlaws he would have killed them then. He would have cut them down for seeing him.

He felt it was unmanly of his mind to return to the witch's words and to dwell on them. Either he was a silly old man like Svein and Oliver, haunted by thoughts of woe and doom, or he was a Get, Morca's son, Morca's own man. To harry the West was not to meet a bloody end on Stone Heath. It need not be. Stone Heath could be ridden by. Cast the thought out, Haldane, and revel in your fortune.

But in the moment before he dismissed his fear, Haldane had a premo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nition, a vision that he knew not whether to heed. He saw himself returning home to find Morca ready to lead the Gets again to Stone Heath. Haldane closed the thought determined that should the vision prove true—which he would doubt—he would warn Morca no whatever Morca said.

He halted his horse on the hill above the new bridge, back on the Pellardy Road once more. At the ford just upstream from the pilings of the fallen bridge there were two Nestorians in gray smocks kneedeep in the chilly water. They bent and searched slowly in the water with their hands, but he thought they watched him, as he would have watched himself if he had been they. He sat taller in the saddle and looked back down the road for Hemming Paleface. Ear served better than eye on the tree-closed road, but there was no more sound than sight of the carl. So much for him.

Haldane set his horse down the road slope and trotted past the bridge pilings standing bare-kneed. He remembered New Bridge on Rock Run when the bridge still existed. He and his mother had passed over it as they traveled the Pellardy Road on their visit to his grandfather in his dun on Little Nail. Of that journey he remembered two things—the bridge and his steel grandfather Arngrim. When they had left Little Nail Arngrim gave him the horn that he still carried, though it was years before he could blow it.

He had wondered that a bridge so old could be called new and had been told not to fret about things Nestorian. But that was all very long ago. It was before Oliver had appeared from the West, before his mother's fall, and even before Morca's hall was built with its second story and its balcony. It was long ago when Haldane was a child and nothing had yet happened.

He reined his horse at the bank of the stream close by the wading men. He waited for respect. Haldane was armed and the Nestorians were not. He sat tall and dry on a handsome gelding while they paddled with the river bottom. He was a Get and they were cattle. For all these reasons he expected to be given attention.

The peasants straightened and touched their foreheads with dripping muddy fingers. It was funny to Haldane. Their fingers left smears. One peasant was old. The other was younger and larger and stood in need of a shave come market day. Like many Nestorians, he had a dull and stupid face.

Haldane was curious to know for what purpose they waded. "What are you doing?" he asked in Nestonian.

"Gathering clams for our dinner, lord," the old man said. He pointed to shells looking like damp shale on the river bank.

Would they really eat shells? These peasants ate many things like roots and mushrooms that a Get would know enough to kick aside as he walked.

"Mussels, too," the younger one said, grinning foolishly.

Haldane shook his head. "How do you eat such stuff?"

"In a broth with fish and vegetables," the old man said. "It is a very good meal."

Haldane waved the answer away because it was not to the question he had asked. The *plain folk* misunderstood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much that was said to them. Odo the Steward was a rare man. Most of his fellow natives understood only the plainest of Nestorian country speech, spoken slowly and clearly, often repeated, often rephrased.

The foolish one said, "We will give you some to take home, lord." And he proffered a shell smeared with mud.

Not to be misunderstood, Haldane said, "Your food is unclean. It is not fit to eat. Now, what late signs or portents have you seen or heard tell of?"

"Nothing, lord," the old one said.

"Nothing?"

"Yes, lord," said the old man. He danced a little shuffling dance in the water as he spoke, shifting from one foot to the other as though he found it cold to stand. Then he balanced on one foot, drawing the other from the water and setting it a-drip against his knee.

"What?"

"Nothing, lord." And he shook his head.

"No signs at all?" said Haldane. "Have you heard aught of a wurox being seen in the forest?"

"Oh, that. Yes, lord. The woodcutters do speak of a wurox they have seen. I have not seen it myself."

Haldane gestured with a questioning hand. "Is that not a portent? Bud-Month is the month when the sun is in the sign of the Wurox."

"No," the old man said. "No, lord. There used to be many wuroxen in the forest. Many, many. They have been away. Now they return."

"Ah, but if that is not a portent, then what is?"

The old man shook his head again. He was almost as slow a head as the other.

"I don't know, lord. I have seen no portents."

"Is that a portent, lord?" the great lout asked. He pointed past Haldane.

Haldane turned in the saddle. It was Hemming Paleface caught up to him at last. Hemming Paleface, a portent? Hemming was too familiar and small to be anything more than himself.

"I know him," said Haldane, "and he is not important."

Hemming reined his chestnut mare in on the slope above the bridge pilings. He waved and called to Haldane.

"Hey, ho, Haldane. Come."

Haldane waved back. "Come here yourself," he called in return.

But Hemming did not come. He sat his horse and waved again to Haldane.

Haldane was angered. Who was Hemming that he should refuse him before these peasants?

The wind blew overhead, scuddling heavy clouds across the sky and the light altered frequently. A sudden shaft of light picked Hemming out as he sat his horse on the slope. And they below were in cloud shadow. In that moment, Hemming looked very like a portent. Or meat for an arrow.

Haldane brought his horse around. His jaw was set tight.

"When will you be putting our bridge back up, lord?" the simple peasant said.

Haldane looked back at him. Fords were made before bridges as any fool knows, and a Get had no need for more. The Gets were careless of bridges. Bridges that fell in Nestor under Gettish rule would stay fallen.

"Continue to wade as you are used to do," Haldane said shortly, clapped

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heels to his horse and rode up the hill.

Hemming Paleface was two year Haldane's elder, but no bigger or stronger. He was not yet finally grown and his paleness was marred by the red remains of pimples nipped young. He was always pinching at himself. He was a dogged unquestioning would-be-good and only half a Get. Haldane meant to have him left behind in the tail when he and Morca raided into Chastain. He had thought on it over night.

Haldane rode up the slope determined to throw Hemming Paleface from his saddle before the eyes of the shell gatherers. He meant they should know Hemming for half a Nestorian. Haldane guided his gelding with one hand and uncumbered his bow with the other and when he reached Hemming he slipped the bow behind his leg and tumbled him. It was an unfair trick fairly played. Haldane laughed at Hemming sitting surprised on his rump on the damp Bud-Month roadway. By his hand a solitary daffodil waved with the wind.

"Pick a bugleflower," Haldane said and rode beyond the hill.

But he checked there and waited until Hemming came riding to join him. In his hand Hemming held the lonely bugleflower. It was not what Haldane would have done, or perhaps it was.

The carl said, "Haldane, you shouldn't have thrown me. I wouldn't throw you."

"Couldn't," said Haldane. "Why would you not ride closer when I called for you to come?"

"I don't like me here so far from the dun. Morca said we two should ride together on account of outlaws venturing out with the springtime. I didn't know those peasants. Where were they from?"

"I never ask those things," Haldane said.

"As ready as peasants, they might have been some outlaws," Hemming said. He was called Hemming Paleface in the same manner that Haldane was Haldane Hardhead, but he heard his earburner more often. "If they were outlaws, it wasn't meet to dump me on the road. Here is the flower you asked me to pick."

Haldane took the flower, pale yellow trumpetmouth, white star, green stalk, belated harbinger of spring. He held it gently.

"They were but peasants gathering shells for dinner," he said, believing that he made his point.

"Outlaws must eat, too."

Haldane knew what outlaws would do because he knew what he would do if he were an outlaw. He had only two standards, himself and Black Morca, and Morca was only to be compared to Morca. He knew outlaws as he knew Hemming, and both of them were much like himself.

"But not shells," he said. "Outlaws would have too much pride. And those two sad cattle were no outlaws. They wouldn't be allowed."

Hemming bowed to Haldane's authority and agreed to judge as Haldane judged. That was because his standards, too, were Black Morca and Haldane.

"Na, Haldane," he said. "Don't ride away from me. My mare will not keep pace with your gelding."

"Why should I stay for you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm your man now. It wouldn't look right to the others if I were not to ride into the dun with you. They would think it strange. And if you were killed on the road before me, I could not tell Morca. You are my clan, Haldane."

Hemming laid a hand on Haldane's arm, their horses standing nose-to-tail, wind gusts whipping. He spoke earnestly.

The old clans of the Gets, the Eight, were blurred in the long passage west and broken on Stone Heath. Morca enlisted men without regard to their grandsire's clan, which other barons might also do, and dealt outside justice, for which he was resented by some. Haldane was a Deldring. Hemming's father had been a Maring. The gravings on Haldane's amulet, his boar's tooth, which he would sometimes study, were Deldring marks. Hemming knew less of Maring.

Haldane tapped Hemming's nose with the bell of the flower. "You are not my man. I am not responsible for you or anything that happens to you."

Hemming spread his hands. "I am your man. I will hold your horse. I will fight for you. I will follow where you lead me. Keep me close."

"Why would you follow me, Hemming Paleface?" Haldane's mind trembled. He wanted to be followed, but by the right men and for the right reasons. He was not yet like Morca, who only wanted to be followed.

Hemming said, "Morca has ordered me to."

"He ordered you to follow me this morning."

"Na, Haldane. He ordered me to be your man. But I like it. I will do better with you than with Morca."

Haldane was angered. There was none of the rightness he wished in having his men tossed to him by Morca as Lothor of Chastain tossed scraps to his dancing lapdog. Not one at a time. Not Hemming. And then Haldane suddenly realized that there would never be a time when he could choose those who would follow him. He could only choose among them. That was more the way Morca would see it.

As though he were taller and stronger, more powerful and more certain than he was, Haldane asked, "How loyal would you be to me, Hemming? What trust could I place in you?"

"I will be your man, Haldane, in all things. I will do what you tell me. Then, as your fortune increases, so will mine."

"Win my love. If Morca says for you to stay and I say for you to go, what will you do?"

"What do you ask of me? Morca would wring my neck. And yours, too."

Haldane leaned to fix his bow in place beneath his leg, still holding the spring flower in his right hand. When he straightened, he looked at Hemming and said, "I wanted to know if you would follow me. Well, if you will not act on my word before my father's, then return to Morca and tell him you would prefer to follow him."

"No, no, Haldane. I will follow you even if Morca wrings my neck." And the carl touched his throat wonderingly.

"Then dismount," Haldane said. And he brought his leg over his black gelding's neck.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The two stepped out on the sward, their tunics whipping about their thighs like drying laundry. The light was pale and green. The trees overhead seethed and boiled, cursing like kettles. Haldane bade Hemming kneel before him. Hemming sank to both knees and Haldane addressed him.

Haldane knew nothing of the ancient Western formulas of fealty. He knew only Morca's practice, and tags of clan oath from childhood games. But he knew how to bind a willing man:

"Hemming, son of Wermund, if you serve me truly in all things, following my word whether I am king or whether I am carl, I will make you a main man of mine. I will see to your welfare. I will lead you to your profit. But if ever you play me false, your life is mine. I will kill you where I find you. So I do swear."

Haldane kissed the bell of the daffodil. He held it before him.

"Now, if you swear to serve me, and offer me your life as your earnest, then kiss this bugleflower and wear it as my badge."

When they two, Haldane followed by Hemming, rode through the open gates of Morca's Dun harried by a wind turned cold, there were horsemen gathering in the yard. Haldane thought of his resolve to tell Morca not to venture onto Stone Heath, and his tongue touched his chipped tooth. No one had remarked on his tooth but his tongue knew that it was rough and shorter, and worried. But it was not Morca, only Ivor Fish-eye and a party.

"Where are you to?" Haldane called.

Ivor was among Morca's barons, a narrow dark thinking man who would hide himself behind his dead white eye, then peep round the corner and flash his good eye blackly. His party was bundled against the gathering chill of the day and well-armed. Among the party were two of Lothor's men of Chastain.

"We are off to hunt the wild cow in the woods. I will show these foreign men how a Get kills. I'll have the horns. What is that flower in your shirt?"

"It is my badge he wears," Haldane said. "He is my army."

"Are you a baron now to have your own army, Morca's Haldane? Will you match your army against mine?"

"Not yet," Haldane said. "After I am married."

Ivor hid behind his eye. "Perhaps you are right," he said. "I should force you now while you are small." He laughed, gathered his party with a hand and said, "Let us leave to seek and kill the unknown beast."

It was the most lightly spoken Haldane had found Ivor. They were not familiars. The hunting party rode out into the bite of wind and Haldane and Hemming into the warmth of the stable. Haldane left his horse there in the care of his army and crossed the yard to the Hall.

6

THE MAIN ROOM of Morca's Hall was set for hearing. Morca sat alone on the dais in his great chair, ankle cocked on knee, hand on ankle, enjoying his singularity. Below him, within a circle of crowded benches, stood a little baron, Aella of Long Barrow, pleading some case.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fires burned warmly in their places. With breakfast long past and dinner a rumbling dream to be quieted with kitchen filchings, the boards and trestles were stacked by the walls. Barons and carls sat the circled benches listening to Aella and watching Morca, or moved about the room talking low amongst themselves, or perched atop the stacks, legs swinging. All but old Svein, conning the room from his staircase.

Haldane's ears and cheeks were heated red in the new warmth of the Hall. He spied Rolf the carl leaning against the dinner boards. He joined him and asked with an inclination of his head, "What progresses?"

"Nothing," said Rolf. "Aella seeks leave to withdraw. He says he has present occupation at home."

This was news of small interest to the boy. Aella was a minor man befitted best for long dull errands.

"Where is your fork?" Haldane asked, for he saw that Rolf's fork was missing.

Rolf looked chastened. "I should have taken two when I had the chance. I lost it last night to a stay-at-home. Ludbert lead-butt won it from me at dice and he will only give it back in trade for my cord. I'll kill him and take it back, I think."

From the dais, Morca said, "Go then, Aella. You have my leave. But return for the betrothal banquet one week tomorrow and witness the sealing of Haldane to the Princess Marthe of Chastain."

"I will an I can, Morca. I will do my best," Aella said, and smiled. He bowed deeply and withdrew.

Before Morca could signal for another to come forward, Haldane made his way to the dais, conscious all the while of men's eyes upon him. It was more attention than he was used to, the result of this marriage of politics. He walked the straighter for it.

Morca saw him coming. In his great roaring voice he said, "Hey, Haldane, you have affairs to attend to." He waved to a Nestorian serf, one of Odo's go-fetches. "Go tell Lothor to prepare his daughter to receive a wooer."

Men laughed, led by Morca. Haldane stepped up to the dais and went to one knee by Morca's elbow. He wanted Morca to know what he had done.

He said, "Hemming and I have been riding. I have made him my own man now." He spoke low, for Morca's ear alone.

Morca replied publicly, making their business common property. "I know," he said. "It is just as I ordered."

"No," Haldane said. "Hemming follows me now. I have bound him to me by oath." He wanted Morca to know that Hemming was in truth his man now, and not Morca's. No longer Morca's to order. "He is the first man of my army and he moves by my word."

"Well and good," Morca said smiling. "And I will give you more men later."

He left the boy in doubt whether he did understand or no. If experience were the judge, he did not. He would not. He put his great hand on Haldane's shoulder and bore him down, bringing him to both knees.

"Here, sit by me now until your bride is ready to see you." He signalled for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the next piece of business.

Haldane took his place at his father's feet. He had never been in battle but his heart bore scars. He looked out over the assembled men and like a good Get warrior showed nothing of his wounds.

He did not know the man who stepped forward next. It was a stranger to Morca's dun. But Morca knew him.

"Well, Soren Seed-sower, what business do you have with me?"

Old Svein, sitting his stair, knew him, too. "He is a Farthing, Morca," he called. "His great-grandfather was your uncle's enemy. Beware. Never trust a Farthing."

Morca stood in sudden anger. He waved an arm like an ax blade. "Up the stair, old man! I tire of you, Svein All-White All-Wrong. You've lived too long. Open your mouth to me again and I will break your neck."

And he sat him down again as Svein scurried up the stair to his stool and safety. Morca winked at Soren. "Say on."

Soren was a soft plump man. He was no danger to anyone, Farthing or not, great-grandson of a strong and dangerous man or not. Haldane did not know the man, but he knew his name. He was an example often spoken of. He was called Soren Seed-sower because he had settled to the land like a Nestorian. No one wanted to be called a Soren Seed-sower.

"I ask your help again, Morca. Furd Heavyhand still harries me. Now he has taken five pigs and my fourth daughter back to his dun. I want my pigs back. I want Furd to cease his lazy raids. Let him raid West like everyone else if he must raid."

His tone made it plain that he had better things to do than raid the West or anywhere.

"The price is the same price you would not pay before," Morca said.

"My oath?"

"No," said Morca. "Your life if you break your oath."

Soren shook his head. Haldane could not understand why Morca would want the allegiance of such a man. Should strength ally itself with weakness? If he were Morca he would have gone looking for Furd Heavyhand. Better one of Furd than five of Soren.

Soren said, "What will you do to Furd?"

"I will make him cease his raids and return your pigs. And your daughter, too, if you like."

"That isn't necessary. Let him keep her. She will make a sober man of him," Soren said. "All right. I will give you my word, Morca."

He was bending his knee before Morca when the serf returned from Lothor.

"Hold," said Morca to Soren, and waved the go-fetch forward.

Soren, fat as a brood sow ready to drop a litter, was left half-bent. He had to make the decision to rise, set, or remain halfway in-between, and he bobbed indecisively, raising a laugh from these onlookers who were ready to find a laugh in him. He flushed, but then apparently decided that since he was to end on his knees eventually, he might as well do it and be done, and plopped down awkwardly.

The serf spoke to Black Morca. "Lord Morca, the little foreign king says his daughter will receive Lord

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Haldane now. She waits him in the small room."

Morca nodded, waved him away to his corner with one hand and nudged Haldane with the other.

"There's the signal, boy. The Princess Marthe waits for you. Go on, now."

"I would as lief not go. I have met the girl. I know already what she looks like."

Morca clenched his great right fist and showed it to Haldane. "You are marrying the girl," he said. "Don't you think she deserves a second look before you are betrothed?"

Haldane said hastily, "Oh, all right then."

As he left the room, Morca called after, "Don't let her make a sober man of you." And there was laughter.

Haldane paused outside the door of the small room where the princess awaited him. Lothor's little brown heifer. His price for becoming a king and living an epic. He counted to five and to five again, and opened the door.

She stood waiting opposite the door, Lothor's little dog in her arms, a tirewoman at her elbow. The dog yapped to see Haldane.

Marthe was shorter than he remembered. Today she wore no hat and bore less paint, but again she wore a dress that swallowed her. The sleeves were puffed and slit. Her dresses all seemed to have puffed sleeves that made her appear chubby and graceless. Gold chains hung down over her tight, jeweled bodice. Her hair was golden brown, her face was round, and her nose straight and high-bridged. She looked more the younger girl Morca had made her.

Last night after Lothor had retired, it had been recounted how Morca's party had halted well short of the dun at Lothor's insistence so that he and the Princess Marthe might change from their traveling clothes. They wished to make a grand appearance at Morca's dun. They wished to impress all the important people waiting there. The Gets had let them, laughing to themselves.

"But why did they do it?" Haldane asked. If he changed his clothes once in a twelfthnight he counted it often. More like once in a month. And every man who mattered in Morca's dun was with the party. "Who was it for?"

"Well, it must have been for you," said Morca. "And Oliver. And the pigs. And the kitchen women." Everyone laughed as he worked his way down the scale. "Were you impressed?"

"No," said Haldane. "As for the kitchen women, you must ask them."

Now looking the girl over, he still was not impressed. As he closed the door behind him, Marthe handed the dog to the tirewoman who retired a step or two, not so far that she couldn't hear all that was said, but far enough to remove herself from the affairs of her betters, at least by implication. The dog was a trembling fragile thing and it strained futilely to be free. Grunt would have been ashamed to kill it.

Still without a word—for what did he have to say to her?—Marthe. Haldane walked around Marthe, taking advantage of the opportunity to see her from all sides. That, after all, was his reason for coming. As he passed her, the tirewoman backed even farther as though to give him all the room he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

could demand and an extra margin for her own peace of mind. She was a grey woman dressed in grey—greyness compounded.

The young princess of Chastain tried to turn to continue facing him, but her skirts were long and heavy and allowed no freedom of movement. To turn without tangling she must stoop and lift her skirts free. She refused to stoop and she would not tangle herself so she stood still, wrestling with fury, while he looked at her. It pleased him to make her angry because there was nothing else about her that could please him and he craved some satisfaction.

"Have you stripped me with your eyes to your content, you barbarian pig?" she asked.

It was a well-turned nastiness in the narrow Nestorian spoken by the high-born of Chastain, but in the distance between them the nuance was lost. Haldane heard only, "Have you seen your fill?" He did not recognize the word "barbarian". It was not a word used by peasants, by Oliver or by Leonidus the Poet King. And pigs smelled far sweeter to him than they did to her. He came very close to hearing a compliment. Only her tone saved her meaning.

He surprised her by replying in his simple country Nestorian: "That I have. My fill and more." She clearly hadn't expected to be understood at all, but had been speaking bravely for the tirewoman to hear. He turned his back and walked to a chest by the door which he took for a seat.

"So you speak Nestorian," she said.

"That I may talk to serfs and my orders be understood," he said. "But I will teach you Gettish."

"I will not learn it!"

"Please yourself. You may sit in this room and face the wall until you die if that is what you like. You may mumble Nestorian to yourself as you do."

"I will entreat My Lady Libera to strike me dead and burn this place with fire after me."

Haldane's hand went to his boar's tooth. He was afraid, struck to the heart by her words as he would be by any mention of the Goddess. But he would show none of it. Was she kind of the Goddess? Was the witch's hand in this? No matter. He forced a lifted chin, a laugh, and light words.

"Tell me more of your Libera and what she will do."

But she shook her head a sudden and determined no as though she felt she had said too much. And then she just stared at him, her eyes great and round. There was a long and numbing silence.

"Say on."

But she said nothing.

"Say something."

At last she said, "Do you wish me to speak of the weather?"

"If you like."

"I like it not at all. It has been nothing but clouds and cold and rain since we crossed the Nails."

Haldane said, "It is spring." But she was speaking and not listening.

"Or health? I am bruised and sore from traveling over fallen roads." Marthe spoke intensely. "Would you like another subject?"

"An you wish," Haldane said.

"I wanted to have a bath last night and they told me I must wait until we are betrothed. Is this a Gettish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

custom?"

The tirewoman gasped. In a small voice she said, "Oh, my lady! You told your father you would not ask."

"I am asking. Must I stay travel-dirty until we are betrothed?"

"No," said Haldane. "You must stay travel-dirty until bath night. That is Cel's Day coming, the day we are plighted."

She turned away and looked upward. In a desperate voice she said, "Oh, my life! Am I lost? Am I lost? Oh, if I were only home again where life is right. What must I forgo next?"

Haldane said, "You are much too nice. I'll wager my father's treasure that when you shit you have a servant standing ready to wipe you. You are a heavy price to pay for ambition. You should have stayed at home with your own in Chastain and never entered my life."

This stung the girl. Her head snapped round to face him. Her eyes widened in outrage. She opened her mouth to speak and no words came. She hit the air with her fists in frustration.

Finally she managed to say in pain and anger, "I had no choice! Your butcher father has dragged me here to marry you against my will. If I could I would kill him and you, too."

Haldane shrugged. "Sheep are made to be shorn."

"A sheep?" the girl asked. She reached into the folds of her skirt and brought forth a knife. It was no plaything. It was narrower in the blade than Haldane would have liked, but yet it looked to be a mean stinger in the hands of one who could use it. If this girl was one.

"You have brought me here," she said. "You may marry me. "But mind yourself. If you ever lay a hand on me, I shall kill you."

On the instant Haldane was off the great chest on which he sat and across the room. He lifted his left hand and struck the small princess of Chastain a smart slap on the cheek. The dog in the tirewoman's arms yapped sharply. The girl slowly touched her reddening cheek as though to confirm the blow.

"There," Haldane said. "Now I've laid a hand on you."

When Haldane returned to the hall, it was to find Morca's audience concluded and the room emptying of men. He saw Oliver in his red robe, his spectacles on his nose, crossing the room slowly to accost Morca at the foot of his stair. Oliver looked to be suffering the hobbles for his successful display of magical craft before Lothor at dinner. Haldane had not expected to see him abroad today.

Morca raised a palm to Oliver. It held him at bay. "Put out your pipe if you please to talk to me. I will not be smoked to death."

Smoking was a strange and filthy habit Oliver had brought with him out of the West. He said it was a necessary part of his magic. The yellow weed he smoked smelled worse than a singed chicken. It was another reason that men were wary of him. When Haldane had studied magic so briefly, the prospect of having to smoke had dismayed him. He had not studied so long that his dismay was tested.

Oliver put his palm over the bowl. "I was in my cell studying my book for you and your benefit, instead of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sleeping as I would, when I heard that yet another baron has craved leave to depart. How much reason to study my book will you give me?"

"It was only Aella of Long Barrow."

"Don't say only Aella. If you followed my advice you would let no one leave until the betrothal is made and Lothor returned to Chastain. There are too many who will not like this marriage."

"Aella will return for the betrothal. And today Soren Seed-sower has joined me. He likes this marriage fine. And his brothers will follow him shortly into my hands, or so he swears." Morca waved Oliver away. "Put your fears to rest, return to your cell and have your sleep. Nap until dinner."

"I do not speak of lackweights like Aella and Soren. Larger men than they care what you do. In times like this, with witches and kings all about us, outlaws in the forest and enemies aplenty, it is folly to keep an open gate. 'The man who walks barefoot does not plant thorns.' "

"Have you been talking to Svein to be learning his tired saws?" Morca asked. He called up the stair. "Svein, have you and Oliver been hunched together?"

"No, Morca," said Svein from the dark at the top of the stair. "But for once, your foreign man is right. Soren is a Farthing. His great-grandfather was your uncle's enemy. It is folly to let a man like that come and go."

"Enough of this," Morca said. "I will have my way. Hey, Haldane, you are hurt. You are wounded. Did she bite you?"

Haldane touched the bloody cut above his wrist. "She stung me only, but I have pulled her fang."

He reached behind him and brought out her knife. He flipped it in his hand and caught it by its wellworn black leather haft.

Morca roared at that. "I told you she had spirit. Your first war wound. When you have her in your marriage bed you can trade her stroke for stroke and wound for wound."

But Haldane's tongue knew his first war wound better. It touched the rough edge of his chipped tooth. His life was a knot, a chaos of wants and fears, but at the moment he was sure of one thing.

"I have no wish to marry this fat little foreign girl, father," Haldane said. "She does not know Garmund from Garulf."

"You have no wish," said Morca. "My wish is your wish, and my wish is that you marry."

The moment of certainty passed. Morca stared at his son so dominatingly that the boy's resolve broke and drained away.

"Hear me all of you!" Morca shouted. "I want no more argument. It is settled now! The sealing will be a week tomorrow and that is the end of it."

Haldane said, "Bath night." His submission.

Morca said, "Is it? So it is. We'll have our baths in that morning, before the betrothal." His acceptance.

"But first we have to speak with Furd Heavyhand. Make yourself ready, Haldane. We ride to find him come morning."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

7

THE BANQUET in celebration of the betrothal of Princess Marthe, youngest and dearest to Lothor of Chastain of all his daughters, a child whose father's fathers were Jehannes and the Three Kings of Nestria, but whose mother's mothers were even older, to Lord Haldane, son and second to Black Morca, who would be a prince if the Gets had princes, was an early success. Men drank from full stoups and ate from full plates in the same great hall where they had bathed in the morning and witnessed the beginning of an epic in the afternoon. The banquet was the capstone of the day.

An ox fit for best guests turned over one fire. On the other spit hung a wild boar returned by Ivor Fish-eye's hunters. The chief tumult of platter filling was over and men were well-settled to their meat and drink.

The dowry Morca had brought back from Chastain as his price for allowing his son to marry the Princess Marthe lay on display before the dais. All but the great doors, which had been fitted and hung while Morca pursued his business with Furd Heavyhand. Men admired the treasure for its bulk and Morca for his nerve. Morca Bride-stealer. Ho, ho. At his work again.

From his great chair at the table on the dais Morca could see his new doors. He ate beef and sopped his plate with bread. He wore pink ribands braided in his beard for the occasion.

At the table with Morca were other great people. At Morca's right hand, telling him stories to keep them amused, was Oliver, his strange and formidable maker of magic, visible evidence for all the room of Morca's control of powerful forces. Oliver had shed his usual serviceable red woolen for magenta robes of cloth that dazzled the eye.

At Morca's left hand was Lothor of Chastain, cloaked in blue brocade. He pecked at his food and did not laugh at Oliver's stories, even though they were told in Nestorian. He was without his dog tonight, but between bites he fondled the scepter that lay beside his plate, symbol of the slender power of Chastain, as he always did in the presence of the Gets.

Between Lothor and Haldane sat Princess Marthe, the only woman who ate in all the room. Morca had allowed her to eat this meal at the table to give Lothor reason to leave light-hearted. Marthe wore pale blue and white, the colors of ice. Like her father, she was silent except when addressed.

Haldane sat in Morca's second chair, brought downstairs from Morca's quarters. He cut Marthe's pork for her with a new narrow knife he had. His chair, much smaller than Morca's, framed him neatly. Morca had given it to him after the betrothal. Like so much else that had happened in this last week, it was evidence of his father's favor.

Barons and carls and knights of Chastain spilled ale on the rushes and stuffed their guts with meat and savory kitchen dishes. A serving woman carried a trencher new-brought from the kitchen to Svein All-White All-Wrong on his stair and let the oldster breach the pottage. At the next table, Rolf the carl sat with his again friend Ludbert,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

who had gambled for his fork and won. The fork had a new owner now and these two ate with their knives, spoons and fingers like regular Gets.

Elsewhere, together sat Soren Seedsower and Furd Heavyhand, both Morca's men now. They ate bite for bite and drank drink for drink and haggled bride price. Companions at another table were Ivor Fish-eye, eating of the boar his party had taken while they hunted the wurox but found only its stone turds, and Aella of Long Barrow. Aella had returned to Morca's Dun as he had promised. If he had been too late for bath and betrothal, pellmelling up just before the gates were to be closed at nightfall, yet he had been in time for the banquet.

And, at the end of the table below Haldane, sat Hemming, his army, keeping him constant company with his eye. When Haldane—son, Get, story prince, new baron, new washed, new clothed, new betrothed, well-filled and happy—set forth for the outhouse half through the banquet to relieve himself of too much ale and excitement. Hemming Paleface rose and followed at his heels through Morca's splendid new doors and into the night.

Haldane stepped off the porch and into the yard. He breathed the comfort of the night. The air was cool after the close warmth of the hall, and smelled of the living spring. The wind whistled light nonsense through the stockade walls, her merry syrinx. It was a gay time to be alive. The crescent moon had bedded early and the stars were lightly veiled. It was quiet here. The voices within were muffled by the new doors.

"Well, where are we to?" asked Hemming Paleface at Haldane's elbow.

Haldane clapped him on the shoulder. Fiercely, he said, "We are off to the outhouse. Are you game to try, though they be as thick as sand fleas all about us?"

"Who?" asked simple Hemming.

"Why, the enemy. The enemy." Haldane put his hand to his sword. "Will you strike down any man who prevents us from our goal?"

Hemming laughed and nodded. "My head is giddy from craning and from drinking black ale, but you are my captain, Haldane. I will have their lives for you. Oh, it is good to be a Get tonight!"

Haldane and his army bared their swords and rushed through the yard striking singing giant blows that could not be parried. They laughed and Hemming fell and they slew the night many times before Haldane had Hemming on his feet again and they won through to the outhouse and safety. They collapsed against the walls and hungered for breath. For a Get who was half a Nestorian, Hemming was a good Get.

"My sides ache so much I am near to puking," said Haldane. "I can't take this. I must stop laughing. Oh, I am dizzy."

"I owe you my life," said Hemming. "If not for you, I would have been slain where I fell."

Haldane waved it away. "It was nothing. You may have chance someday to serve me like."

The guard in the tower nearby at the corner of the stockade called to find what the hurly was about. They were laughing so loud that his call was lost and he must needs call again.

"Enough," said Haldane to Hem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ming. "We must be sober." He raised his voice in answer. "It is nothing. We are funning. We fight bogies."

"How goes the feast?"

"Drunk. Can we send you ale or meat?"

"Na. No need. I have eaten and I expect my relief at the first moment."

The two young Gets passed inside the outhouse to seek their own relief. When they were pissed dry, their heads were clearer. As they shook themselves and straightened their clothes, Haldane said, "Come early summer when Lothor is back in Dunbar, Morca and I mean to go raping in Chastain. There is a place in the party for you, Hemming."

Hemming had no chance to reply. As they left the outhouse, there were two men on the path. They were knights of Chastain, Lothor's men, quietly drunk for such a gay banquet. One waved a wineskin, the other a sword. They lacked only dice to be ready to duel any man they met on his own terms.

He with the wineskin said, "Hold!" and waved his hand before his companion's face. "Put your sword by. It is Lord Haldane and his man. They wait you inside to toast your betrothal, young lord."

"Did you expect to meet a goblin in the night?" asked Haldane in Nestorian. Though all of Lothor's knights seemed as much alike to him in their sameness as any handful of chicken feed, he thought he knew these two. They were the patient adventurers who had gone hunting each day with Ivor Fish-eye.

"Oh. Yes, goblins. Nestor is full of goblins, but we are well-protected. Here, drink of our wine and arm yourselves for the walk back to the hall. It is a far distance you have come without protection. Our southern wine is proof against any horror of the night."

And in truth Haldane's head was ready to be rung again. The skin was passed from hand to hand. The wine was warming.

When the knight of Chastain had drunk, he offered the skin again to Haldane. "Here. Another drink on your marriage."

"No," said Haldane. "I am just right now."

"I will drink," said Hemming. "To you, my Haldane, my leader." He saluted Haldane and drank. Then he passed the skin back to the foreign knight.

"The field is yours," said Haldane, and they left the outhouse to the strangers.

The torches in Morca's hall flared brightly in their rings on the smoke stained columns, sending licking lights across the revelry. The air was close and warm, smelling of meat and men. There were songs and jokes and calls from table to table. As Haldane and Hemming stood in the door, making room for another of Lothor's men to pass outside, Fat Netta, one of the serving women, slipped on a discarded bone before their eyes. She dropped heavily on her round bottom and her pitcher flew from her hands to drench a carl in ale. He cursed heartily and swung around while men roared. He snatched her up and kissed her soundly, though she was as old as Morca and no prettier. She clouted him with her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pitcher and retreated to the kitchen.

"Bring more ale," the carl called after her. "Earn another kiss."

The calm and quiet of the night were well enough, but this was where the excitement was. It was good to be back in the midst of things. On this night, it was good to be the son of Black Morca. This night, in particular.

Haldane strode the aisle between the tables, feeling tall, feeling himself grown and ready for marriage, war and command and all the other things of being a man and a Get. He was stopped by Rolf's reaching hand thrust out before him. The old carl swung around on his bench, licking his gravy-sopped fingers.

"Aye, don't you look good in your new clothes," he said. "You've grown fine, little Haldane Hardhead. You'll be earning yourself a new name next, and then I won't know you. To think, you a baron now, with men of your own, and I the man who taught you to sit a horse and string a bow."

"Hey, it's not so bad," Haldane said. "There is no need to cry."

Rolf shook his head. The drink he had taken made him soft. "Time passes. That's all. Time passes." And then he said, "Here, a present for you. For your wedding." And he thrust his cord on Haldane, the beautiful string he had brought with him from Chastain. And Haldane could not say no.

Haldane said, "Morca has promised me more men now. I can have my choice if I ask for it. I will. Shall I ask him for you? I would like you to be one of my own men."

Rolf was touched. "Oh, aye. Aye. Ask him." He controlled his voice with difficulty and wiped his nose with his knuckle.

Then he said, "I've been stealing looks at your partridge princess. She's strange, but she's not so strange that she can't be improved. Just remember, boy—'It's bit and spur that make a horse jump.' Swive her well and she will be a Get in no time."

His friend Ludbert beside him said, "Will you teach him that, too?" And ducked away from Rolf's hand.

Haldane Bridegroom made his way to the dais and sat down again in his chair. His own chair. He was not yet accustomed to having a back to rest against and an arm to lean on, but he liked the chair well. It made him proud and happy. In the frame of the chair, he felt himself the picture of Morca's heir.

But after a single bite of meat grown cold, he leaned forward to see past the lesser part of his epic, eating her last meal here on the dais. Not eating. There was a slice of beef untouched lying atop the pork that he had been good enough to cut for her since she was too dainty to use her hands and he would not give her knife back to let her cut him again as she had threatened. Marthe's head hung over her plate and her hands were tucked away in her lap.

Haldane said, "What have I missed while I was gone?" He wished to know what pleasures he had traded for his swallow of Chastain wine.

"Ah," Morca said in Nestorian. "I was asking your bride if it is true that she cannot tell Garulf from Garmund. It is true. She has no answer. You have much to teach her, Haldane. Start with that."

The plump child princess shook her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head dumbly. She turned her head away from Morca into her shoulder.

"It is easy," Haldane said to the buried face. "Garmund was my grandfather. He was king. Garulf was his brother. He was king before Garmund."

"There you are!" said Morca. "It is as easy as that."

But the girl did not look up. She seemed ready to cry. Where was her fire now? Haldane was disgusted. As soon as Lothor was safely gone, he would take her away to a private room and shut the door behind her.

Lothor glanced up then, tapped the hard knob of his stick against palm and gestured with it, speaking in his whip-thin voice:

"They are right," he said. "You remember the Three Kings of Nestria without confusion, my child. Garulf and Garmund are as easy as Leon, Leonus and Leonidus. Garulf was he that we killed at Stone Heath and left for crows to pick over. Garmund was the other. He would sneak secretly into the West, rob and burn and slip away. Like Morca, his son. Can you remember that? It is simplicity itself."

Marthe nodded without words. Haldane was thunderstruck by Lothor's presumption. Oliver could only stare.

But Black Morca was so angered by these words of Lothor's that he slammed the tableboard with his fist and made the dishes dance. Morca was so angered that he could not speak. The ribands in his beard quivered. He struck the table again and again until it rang like a bell and came nigh to cracking. A platter fell to the floor spilling good meat and juices amidst the rush-cover. The room stilled and all eyes turned to Morca at these evidences of his wrath.

Oliver was the first who was able to speak through the silence that followed. He said, "You speak bravely for one so far from home. An I were you, I would shave my tongue and be content to leave it unwagged until the hair grew back. Or I were safe again in Chastain."

"But you are not me, fat man," said Lothor of Chastain. "And I am no barefoot wizard piddling with dinner magic, Jan be thanked. Nor am I a bride-thief barbarian king. The time has come for all of us to show ourselves. We are what we are. And there am I."

He pointed to the doorway and Morca's eye followed, as Haldane had looked after the witch Jael's misleading hand. The new doors, once Lothor's, now Morca's, stood wide-flung. The room silenced. In the doorway stood two Get barons, Egil Two-fist and Coughing Romund, no friends to Morca. Behind them were a press of men, Get barons and carls. And Lothor's knights of Chastain, naked swords in hand, fresh come from killing the watch and throwing open the gates. Romund coughed in the silence and then they were pouring into the room, all sober and intent on ending Morca's pretensions in one stroke.

Old Svein Half-White Half-Right on his staircase stood and threw down his dinner. He yelled, "Up! Up! Morca, we are undone! Your ambitions have brought fire down on us!"

As Morca looked to the doorway and

(cont. on page 122)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John Gardner is a novelist of note (his most recent, The Sunlight Dialogues, *was the subject of a front-page review in* The New York Times Book Review*), whose work has in the past resonated with fantasy (*Grendel, *was a retelling of the Beowulf legend, for example). In the story which follows he evokes another time and style of narration to compelling effect as he describes—*

THE RAVAGES OF SPRING

JOHN GARDNER

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

LIFE, I'VE OFTEN BEEN inclined to believe, is preposterous. Witness, for instance, the fact that I of all people should be elected to tell this tale. I have, like other men, my virtues and defects—rather more virtues than defects, I believe (and I would say the same of any other more or less law-abiding man)—but I am not, have never been, the kind of being who causes great stirrings and swarmings whenever he sits or nibbles a pastry or puts his cap on. I'm as plain a man as was ever set to toiling and grieving on this godforsaken planet: a bachelor; a reader of dull books; a country doctor.

But perhaps the powers are wiser than they seem, choosing a common, unpoetic soul for a tale at first glance more fit for the author of "The Raven" or that even more curious masterpiece of feeling and thought caught in one great gasp, the "Ulalume." I am not, like Mr. Poe, a Platonist. (So he seems, at least, in the writings I've encountered.) I am, as I say, a country doctor, and what I chiefly know about absolute values is that they do not necessarily aid the digestion, but frequently impair it. Neither can I whole-heartedly share the Platonistic predilection for Eternity as opposed to Present Time. In my youth I used to ponder, in mixed discomfiture and annoyance, the remark of the famous chemist Davy, that when he had heard, with disgust, in the dissecting rooms, the opinion of the physiologists on the gradual accretion of matter, and its becoming endowed with irritability, ripening into sensibility, and acquiring such organs as were necessary by its own inherent forces, and at last issuing into intellectual existence—when he heard this atheist opinion, he remarked, a walk into green fields or woods, beside the banks of rivers, would bring back his spirit and feelings from Nature to God. I concluded, in the end, that Humphry Davy was a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perfect fool, though, by no means mistaken. His pompous bray refuted nothing, but the walk was a piece of pure sanity. The mulch of the flowering spirit is under thy feet, neighbour!

All this may seem wearysome and irrelevant to you. Most people, I've noticed, are forever impatient, always hustling and bustling and darting their eyes around, now glancing nervously back past their shoulders, now craning forward in hopes of discerning in the mists of Time the outlines of things yet to be. I take no part in all that. I stand pretty firmly where I happen to be put, and I ponder things. I do not necessarily learn anything. But pondering is good for the constitution: it lends a wise calm to all bodily parts and lends to the mind and soul a special dignity, like that of an old Red Indian sitting in an oak. I like things done properly—even tortuously, when that's what's required—but done by a man who's got one ear cocked toward the infinite. It's for that reason I begin this tale with a few rather ponderous but needful remarks about myself.

It is difficult, however . . .

Hmm. Yes.

Perhaps I will drop that approach and attempt some other.

2

WE ALWAYS have tornados in the spring, down in southern Illinois. I've grown used to them, and thoroughly fatalistic. I feel, perhaps, a certain hesitancy about going out on calls on one of those mornings whose calm forebodes a twister. But sickness does not start up and stop as birdsongs do, de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pending on the weather, and so, despite the uneasy feeling, I hitch up Shakespeare, throw in my medical bag, and away we go. The weather darkens, as the day progresses; my uneasiness increases, and so does Shakespeare's. He glances at me as I come out from a call and loose the reins from the hitchingpost, and I throw a glance back at him, startled by some fear far, far below conscious thought. It's as if, for an instant, we don't recognize each other, after all these years together. In a flash, that's past, the ear that seemed, for one stroke of a heartbeat, to be flattening back like a warhorse's ear, is erect once more, and the eyeball that seemed to have madness in it is merely my old friend Shakespeare's eye, long suffering and possibly amused. I glance at the sky. So does he. "Getting darker," I say, and the old horse considers it, turning it over in his mind till he forgets what made him think of it. I chat on, riding down country roads, saying pretty much what I say to my patients to keep their minds off aches and pains. And the sky darkens further—blue clouds, almost black, coming over from south-south-west. The light burns green, slanting from the east, and the forested hills are suddenly beautiful: great, white sycamores bursting through the blue-black and emerald green forest like heart attacks, and above us the thunderheads loaded and flickering with lightning like a dying man's brain.

At the crest of the hill, on this particular occasion—the occasion I've set out to recount to you—I tug at the reins, he resists, I tug harder, and we stop. I gaze at a world transmogrified: glowing green fields, woodlots with trees as gray as bones, bright houses and barns, and winding between them, the rich, gravy brown of the road. The horse turns his head. He thinks I'm a fool, and he's correct.

Then comes the wind. We can see it from ten miles away, coming at us, moving across the whole world like a thrasher's scythe. Where its cutting edge is, trees burst to life with the shudder of a infant first sucking in air, and behind, in the swath of the wind, even oak trees bend and buckle, and the willows are in motion like the sea. Then rain slams down on the hot, cracked earth. It kills more things than it nourishes, no doubt. Down in southern Illinois, whatever can make it through the ravages of spring to the time when the heavy wet heat moves in, crowding every meadow and marsh with green—the time when the rattlesnakes come out on the rocks in dry, brown creeks to sun themselves (coil on coil, their hatchet heads lifted to watch you pass). . . the deadly hot summer when farmers get up before dawn to hoe bottomlands, and work there only till the dew's off the ground, then quit, which happens when the sun's shoulder high . . . in summer, I was saying . . .

The wind. Let me see.

We stood there in the road, watching, and it seems I fell into a momentary trance. The storm came plunging northward toward us, and it never even crossed my mind that I ought to seek shelter. Grass, birds, underbrush-creatures around us were hushed and motionless, hugging the ground, waiting as they do when an eagle's been sighted. And then, not one at a time but si-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

multaneously, like angels arriving out of nowhere in a vision, three enormous black cyclones appeared, maybe twenty miles away, and they came along, crazily swaying like wild black savages, dancing where the scythe had passed.

The world came awake, whispering alarm at the first little puff of wind, and old Shakespeare bolted.

3

In many ways horses are wiser than men, and so old Shakespeare proved that afternoon. He shot straight forward, downhill toward the storm, and just in the nick of time I saw what his plan was. Some fifty yards from where I'd paused to consider the beauty and grandeur of Nature in her rage—some fifty yards from where, no doubt, my absentminded stare would soon have plunged me headlong back into the buzzing, blooming confusion—stood old gateposts of hand-hewn stone, which supported enormous black iron gates of the kind one sees mainly at the entrances to graveyards. The gates were wide open (they were normally locked with a padlock and a length of rusty chain), but closed or open, no sensible creature in all southern Illinois, except a horse, would have ventured up that driveway. When I saw the turn coming, I threw myself violently left, snatching at the seat-rail and clinging, and somehow remained with the carriage, which remained with the horse. The world fell silent, as if we'd crossed from one sphere of reality to another. The carriage-wheels, moving through deep, lush grass, made not even a squeak; old Shakespeare's hooves were the hooves of a dream horse: he might have been rushing past planets toward deepest space. Above us, huge beams of old trees interlocked, and what little light there was left in the world came in needles. So we rode for what might have been hours, silent as phantoms in that silent lane. It was not, of course, hours. Two minutes, perhaps.

I am not a man given to foolish superstitions, nor am I in the ordinary sense religious, though my father was a Presbyterian minister and I begin to suspect I will carry his habits of speech to my grave, for their inherent felicity if nothing else. Much less am I a person of easy credulity. I have heard too much gossip in my fifty-four years to give credence to even a little of it; and I have seen too often, in my chosen profession, the errors of other men's eyes and ears and chests. I diagnose on the basis of evidence, and that which I cannot understand I respect and ponder.

Nevertheless, as I have said, I would not personally have chosen that lane, even to escape a midwestern tornado. There were stories—nebulous, disquieting. Things had been seen, apparitions or whatever, which so bothered those who believed they'd seen them that they preferred to remain unspecific. I had treated certain patients whose physical condition suggested to me (though I would neither swear that it was true or untrue) that something up there on that hill was decidedly wrong. I had no particular idea what it was and, believe it or not, no great interest in learning. Whatever evil the place entertained, it did not come aggressively out to us, but waited, quiet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and contented, like a sleeping dragon. There were of course some who were more curious than I. Of those who went up to the house to taunt it, poke it with a stick to learn what unnatural anger they could rouse, some came back baffled, having learned and seen nothing; others came back troubled, uncommunicative. Some who swore they'd seen nothing whatever did not seem to me entirely convincing.

"Strange business," I'd say to myself, and I'd hook my glasses back over my ear, dismissing it. "Let him sleep with the lamp on, if the boy insists," I would say to the mother. "We must never be overly contentious in dealing with Nature." And I'd leave her with pills for the young philosopher's sedation.

Shakespeare, however, took a princely disinterest in my reasonable aversion or my reasons for it. Any port in a storm was *his* philosophy, and I (with the thunder now crashing above us, and the rain slamming down, bringing sticks and leaves)—was in no real position to debate with him.

4

THEN, AHEAD OF US, there was a widening patch of sea-green sky full of lightning flashes—the world was howling, everything was churning, writhing, screaming, obscured to the vagueness of things seen underwater—or things wrapped in fire—by the plunging, blood-dark rain. At the center of the patch of unnatural light stood the house we'd all of us heard of and some, as I've said, had reportedly seen. Smaller, humbler than I would have expected. No work of evil men or devils is finally impressive compared to the vastness of the universe or the hopeful imagination. And yet it was a fine old house, for southern Illinois. Tall and morose, with heaven knows how many rooms, and a soaring, blunt tower that swayed like something alive in that violent wind. Beside the tower lay a graveyard, its tombstones crooked and skewbald as an old wolf's teeth. In the house there were no lights, no signs of habitation.

We hurtled silently toward it, alien creatures in the storm's loud tumult. I thought nothing, smashing my hat to my head, soaked to the bone like a drowning man. Then, little by little, I became aware of the horse's indecision. Not fear of the great, dark house, but simple bafflement. The house stood alone—one moment blazing like a jewel in the lightning's flash, the next moment invisible, a void. Alone!—no barn, no shelter for four-legged creatures, however well-meaning their hearts or adept their minds.

I tugged at the reins and, surprisingly, he responded. The nightmarish gallop slowed down toward reason, and in a moment I was guiding him, controlling his terror. His headlong rush dropped down to mere hurry, then dropped down further to a considered trot, and finally, after a struggle of our two uncertain wills, to something resembling a walk. I snatched off my glasses so that I could help him see, folded them carefully away in my pocket, and guided him along the graveyard fence to a rough, natural wall, almost cave, defended by bedraggled hemlocks and pale, square

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boulders. There, where the wind whipped over us, harmless, and the rain, flying by, left us almost untouched, I jerked the reins with my stubborn human intelligence—whatever he might think, I was sure I was right—and he deferred to me and stopped. After a moment I got down. The earth felt strange, unnatural to my feet; my soaked trousers clung, chilly, to my skin; my rear end was bruised and sorrowful, and I could have drawn you, by feeling out my fiery pains, a scheme of the human muscle system. I went around to his head. He was wheezing like a steam engine, and crying. It's not generally recognized that horses cry; but I give you the word of a medical doctor and veterinarian that more than rain was streaming down those coal-black cheeks.

"Whoa, boy," I said, and stroked his nose. He stood swaybacked and suffering, remorseful. "No harm," I said, still stroking his nose. "You've found us a fine, safe place to wait it out." He turned his head toward me and moved it with my hand. I could hardly stand his sorrow. No doubt that will seem a mite strange to some. (Human arrogance is never spent.) Nevertheless, the horse was profoundly ashamed and grieved at the way he's stolen the authority.

In the end he was comforted and accepted my decision. I then made another, which was not altogether defensible, but I had no reasonable alternative. It was a simple fact that I had seen those twisters, and even a fatalist must cling to common sense. High wind is one thing; a twister is another. The wind that tore through the trees around us was dangerous enough—it snapped hugh branches, smashed lilac bushes, even tore out boulders and rolled them as much as ten feet from their places. We were safe in our shelter if no cyclone struck. But cyclones are fanatic. No shelter can save you but the shelter designed by human ingenuity—deep in the earth, Time's womb, as the evolutionists say. I've read about twisters that have raised whole houses up and sprayed human beings through four, five states. Whatever strange beings might live in that old towered house beyond the graveyard, if they were southern Illinoisans, they had a storm cellar. I couldn't save my horse if a twister came wrecking all life where we stood, but I could crawl to that house in the hope of encountering friendly spirits and perhaps be saved.

"Stay here, boy," I said, and I gave his wet, black neck a pat. "Do as I say. I'll be back for you."

No point recounting what terror I felt, crawling, clinging with both hands to the earth, fighting through the open space of unmowed lawn and tearing wind, toward the house that stood, stupidly defiant, on the treeless crest. Uprooted trees came lumbering toward me, slow and unnatural, like underwater creatures, snatching at me, and with them came smaller, swifter objects I couldn't identify. Something living struck me on its way to its doom—a woodchuck, a rabbit, I have no idea—and clung with all its power till I beat it away. The roar of the world was deafening, the dust and small stones blown like needles against my face made me cough and clamp my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes shut. But at last, by some miracle, I reached the porch, slippery as flesh with ancient paint, and, still lying on my stomach, I pounded at the door. I couldn't hear myself what sound I made. Bucking the wind, I reached for the huge brass doorknob—it was shaped like a gryphon's head—and turned it. The door shot open. I tumbled in, driven by a gust that caught me like the kick of a mule, and lay on the carpet gasping for breath. Then the room quieted. Someone or something had closed the door.

I lay there groaning, no wiser than a horse. And then I fainted.

5

I CAME BACK to consciousness on an old damp horsehair couch. I was aware, at first, only of the couch and the wallpaper, both of them thickly patterened with flowers, dark as cave-walls, and scented with cat or baby urine. Little by little, I remembered what had happened, and I heard, as if in dim memory, the howl of the wind—clattering shutters against old brick walls, whistling past cornices, cracking the limbs of nearby trees. As consciousness brightened, I came to understand that the wind, the couch, the dark, flocked wallpaper, rotted by years in this thick, swampy climate, were real. There was a voice, a woman's. It had been going, like a voice in a dream, for some time. It sharpened now. What it said, I couldn't tell. I was dressed in warm, fresh-smelling clothes and had my spectacles on. Someone had cleaned them.

Then there seemed to be another voice, a man's. I opened my eyes (I had slept again), and a blurry face was craning forward, looking down at me. I was aware, at first, only of red, red hair sweeping out like some ludicrous halo on a Sunday-school painting, henna-red hair as ferocious and unnatural as the hair on an antique ventriloquist's dummy. A sharp pain went up through my sinus passages and in a moment I recognized it: smelling salts. The voice said clearly, "He's reviving now." And then, without transition (as it seemed to me), I was sitting up, holding a glass of hot wine, and the red-headed man sat across from me, speaking, the wind still howling. On a low walnut table beside him an oil-lamp flickered in the drafts that moved, indecisive and troubled, through the room. A figure all in white withdrew from us.

"A physician," he said. "Interesting."

I'd apparently been holding conversation with him, but I had, now, no memory of it.

He was silent for a time. Gradually his features came into focus. He had, I saw, no ordinary face. Enormous gazelle eyes as pale as glass, an up-tilted nose above protruding, crooked teeth, and skin very nearly as ashen as dried-out clay. It was not necessarily an alarming face, though my first reaction was definitely alarm; but it was, emphatically, a kind of face you'd not expect to see twice on one planet. A vague uneasiness crept over me, or perhaps creeps over me now, the alarm of hindsight.

"I'm a physician myself," he said, "—or used to be." His smile was as quick and unsettling as lightning. "I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gave up all caring for the sick long ago—stabbing deeper, so to speak. Driving my scalpel to the heart of things. If I could make sense of my terrible discoveries—"

Sudden as a genie, the women dressed in white was there. I gave a little jump, in fact, she materialized so quickly. Yet her stance was casual, her pale, almost transparent hand seemed gentle and loving on his shoulder, drawing him back from me, calming him. "Surely our guest is not interested in that!" Her smile, false or not, was magnificent, transforming a plain, almost ghostly face into something radiant. Her hair was black, perhaps Italian, possibly Semitic, but some sickness (I suspected a cancer of the blood) had robbed her of the bloom one expects in Mediterranians and had left her face moon-like, lusterless. She was twenty or twenty-five, not older. Her eyes, limpid brown, were startling if you happened to compare them with her husband's (if he was, as I assumed, her husband)—those large eyes as cold and intellectual as death. One did not need to be a medical man to see that my host was in an extremely unhealthy psychological state and that the woman meant, subtly, to protect him from himself and me from him.

I said quickly, in slight befuddlement, "Not at all, not at all! It's always a pleasure to meet a fellow physician!" And, a second too late, I gave a hearty laugh. It rang out demonic in the huge dim room. They exchanged looks swifter than lightning bolts, and the man's lips parted and stretched back in a grin. His crooked, jammed teeth flashed. For no reason that I can explain even now, a shock of terror went through me, blasted like a deep-laid dynamite charge from my spine to my brain. And instantly, as if to confirm that warning from the pit, the ghastly little scientist hurled himself toward me and snatched my free hand—my wine went flying, and I gave, I fear, a ridiculous whoop—but then, through my terror, I heard him bleating: "God bless you, Doctor! You've no conception what this does for me!" Then, seeing the wine splashed all over my knees, he shrank back, eyes widened, like a terrified horse. "Forgive me!" he cried.

"No no!" I said, "no trouble! Mere trifle!" The pounding of my heart was dangerous, and I gasped for air, but pretended, even so, to laugh it off.

"Mother," he said, "a cloth, quickly!"

She fled from the room. I stared after her, still clutching my chest. "That's your mother?" I said, and took my glasses off. The woman was unquestionably ten years his junior. Immediately I saw my mistake—or thought I did. A mode of expression, one parent to another. Nevertheless the sudden light in the pale man's eyes was disquieting.

"All in good time," he said, and showed his teeth. The excitement in his voice was not comforting, nor was her shriek from a distant room, assuring us that she'd found a cloth. Mad as March hares, the both of them, I thought. I must step wary.

Now the woman had returned with the cloth and was dabbing at my knees and slippers, laboring quickly and shyly, her face tipped to one side, like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an often whipped dog, or like one of those wasting saints in old, old paintings. I watched her narrowly. But that moment a great jolt shook the whole house, and I remembered—amazed that I'd forgotten—what I'd come for.

"Good heavens!" I said, "we must all hurry down to the storm cellar!"

They looked at one another in what I'd swear was panic, then immediately smiled, disingenuous as thieves. "Impossible!" they both said at once. The doctor leaned forward and, splashing out his arms as if trying to communicate in a foreign language, said: "Out of the question! The storm cellar's flooded!" *"Flooded!"* she squealed, a split second after him. They laughed, hard and sharp, as if at some ghastly gallows-joke.

"Flooded?" I said. I studied first one, then the other. "I see." You may imagine that you, in my place, would have insisted. But I assure you, one can never be too careful with these people.

Now the woman had poured me more spiced hot wine. It seemed to me unnaturally dark and thick. On reflection I determined to leave it untouched, though without appearing to do so.

"But rest assured, Doctor," she was saying as she poured. "Our house is completely invulnerable."

I thought of the tower I'd seen teetering in the wind, and sweat popped out on my forehead. It seemed to me now that I could hear it creaking, rocking the whole house from side to side. The woman poured wine for my host.

And now once more the pale man hurled himself forward from his chair, his white hand flashing toward me like a knife. "Forgive me! I've failed to introduce myself! I'm Professor John Hunter."

I no doubt showed my surprise and, immediately afterward, my horror. "John Hunter the geneticist?" I asked, too casual.

"The same!" he said.

And so now I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was dangerously mad—as mad as the true Professor Hunter, dead these thirty years and entombed with his victims. "I'm glad to meet you, sir," I said. "And I am—" I examined his face, decided to be cautious. "Dr. William Thorpe." We shook hands. He looked at me, clinging like a monkey to my hand, clinging as if he would never let me loose, yet innocently smiling, and I knew—as surely doomed as a prisoner hearing the judge read his death-sentence—that "Professor Hunter" had been through my belongings and was apprised that William Thorpe was not my name.

6

WHO KNOWS WHAT DROVE him to talk to me? The woman did not like it, but there was nothing she could do. He sat leaning forward, his face in darkness, his red hair lighted by the flickering lamp. He talked to me of Gnostics, Albigensians. I have only the vaguest idea what he said or why the poor demented devil should be, as obviously he was, so outraged by long-dead heresies. At times, too excited to remain in his seat, the professor would leap up to pace, head and shoulders

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thrown violently forward, his nostrils flaring, his enormous pale eyes rolling in his head like my Shakespeare's.

All the world, he said, went stark raving mad in the second century, when the Gnostics separated body and mind. And the bitter proof, perfect ikon of it all, was the twelfth-century Albigensians. His eyes grew paler and paler as he talked, or so it seemed to me, and the knuckles of his clenched fists went white, almost blue. To the Albigensians flesh was worthless and meaningless, he said. The inner circle, the old initiates, turned further and further from bodily delights, and eventually the chief of them starved themselves to death: Meanwhile, those of the outer circle, equally persuaded that flesh was irrelevant, gorged themselves and drank themselves blind—irrelevant—and organized orgies of fierce though unimportant copulation. So while the old men upstairs, in the inner sanctum, starved, indifferently abandoning life, the younger, downstairs, indifferently consumed it. Once the mind cuts reality in two, not all the king's horses or horsemen can reassemble it. I said the opinion was interesting. What else could I say?

He spoke very softly—now and then throwing me a worried glance—of his work in the field of genetics. He pitched his gaze just higher than my head (standing pressed into the corner now, as if someone in the room had driven him there) and he spoke with unnatural gentleness, as if to renounce John Hunter's history of laboratory murders—grave on grave of dead foetises—or as if he had hope of appeasing the howl and shriek outside.

"But to men of true Imagination," he said—and cast his eyes toward the shuddering ceiling—"to men of Feeling and Intellect, the truths of the Ancients need not be exhausted! Suppose you and I should deny God's existence, crush the mad poets' idea of Soul. Would we not have at last made life whole again?"

"Wholly bad, I venture."

"Perhaps, perhaps! But then again, we might get a shock, don't you think, Doctor? Suppose all goodness is immanent, buried in matter—in animal spirits, the humours, in cryptrach, inorganic atoms—buried there since Time began, where it labors to be born? Suppose knowledge is a thing that can be eaten, as cannibals imagine—West Indian savages, for instance, who consume the shamins of rival tribes. Suppose, in other words, that knowledge is actually, in some way we can't understand, mere *meat*."

The anguished wringing of the woman's hands was dreadful to behold. My diagnosis was that the man's revelation of his mind's imbalance was profoundly unsettling to her sensitive soul. I'd have comforted the lady if possible. But I could hardly reach out and pat her arm to reveal my fellow-feeling. Hunter's eyes, paranoiacally rolling, missed nothing.

"The hypothesis would not be very *good* for one, it seems to me," I said. "As to its ultimate truth or falsity—"

"Heaven knows, not 'good for one,' not *healthy*, I agree!" He blanched, lips trembling and clasped his hands together. "Yet what is the intellect for if not to penetrate, dissect? There's your God, Dr. Thorpe! The human in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tellect!—God and Devil both! It creates and burns the crepuscular world with its own pale flame and leaves nothing in its wake."

I fidgited. He was actually catching me up in his lunatic paradoxes. Rather than reason with a raving madman, rather than play my mouse's part in his mysterious game of cat and mouse, I would sit more heavily, arms pressed firmly to the arms of my chair, my spectacles rigid and low on my nose. I would cling to common sense as to an oak tree. "You say knowledge is meat. You would hardly call beefsteak crepuscular, a thing of twilight."

He leaned forward, squinting. "Nothing exists, Dr. Thorpe. We're dreams in the mind of a sleeping dragon. That's our hope."

"Thus I refute Bishop Berkeley!" I said, rather fiercely, and gave the chair-arm a resounding thump.

He squealed with laughter, a noise indescribably terrible to my ears, as if the chair-arm should suddenly have felt pain and should confusedly express it by a laugh. Then for a long time Hunter was silent, his frightened eyes riveted to me. The swaying oil-lamp above projected his shadow on the wall, a crouched, wild-headed animal. I received a strong impression that the poor man was trying to tell me something, flash me some warning or signal some desperate appeal. I glanced at the woman—small, dressed in white, like a virgin laid out for her funeral. Was it possible, I wondered, that *she* was the threat, and Hunter's nonsense all aimed, in fact . . . Sickly as she was in all other respects, her bosom was large, like the bosom of a healthy young wet-nurse.

Puzzling. —But the storm, baying, tearing with ferocious jaws at Time and Space . . .

I've lost my thread. Let me see.

He spoke of LaMarck's idea, in *Zoological Philosophy*, of the transfer, from male to female, of a complete but tiny man. The old idea was in part correct, he said, though in ways no one but he, John Hunter, had recognized. He spoke of the theory of inherent influences—the idea, now all but universally scorned, that a rifleman's child might be born with the overdeveloped shoulder of his father. That too, though greatly oversimplified, was true. And he told of some monk who had recently gotten some curious information from beans—or perhaps peas; I've forgotten. I understood, alas, hardly two words out of three. It was all very technical, and even though I am, in a sense, a scientific man, it was beyond me. I set it down as gibberish, in fact. Mere fancy without judgment.

Perhaps he guessed that. He fell silent, studying me intensely. Suddenly, out of the blue, he asked: "Does the Greek word *clone* have any meaning to you, Doctor?"

I searched through what little remained of my Greek. Then: "It means *crowd*, if I remember rightly."

"Exactly!" He smiled, then went still more pale. "Dr. Thorpe, I have discovered the secret of cloning animals—including human beings. I can turn one animal to an infinite number, every last one of them identical, a perfect duplicate."

"Nonsense," I said. I spoke sternly,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to snap the man out of it; but one might as well have rebuked the storm.

"I've discovered a ray with strange properties—that is, I think it's a ray. Perhaps a stream of particles, or motes. In any case—" He glanced nervously at the woman, then, with sudden determination, crossed to a desk at the far end of the room, opened it, and brought out a deguerrotype. He looked at it a moment, as if screwing up his courage, then hurried over to my chair with it. He practically hurled it at me, snapping his lean, stiff arm at me, the deguerrotype hanging in his violently shaking fingers. "Dr. Thorpe, do you recognize this man?"

It struck me that I did, though at first I couldn't place the features. Then with a jolt I remembered the etching one comes across so often in old medical books. "Why, that's Hunter!" I said, and was immediately flustered. My host, he claimed, was this same Professor Hunter. But the man in the picture was in his seventies. His beard was trim, his bespectacled eyes were . . .

Hardly knowing, I . . .

Hardly knowing what I was doing, I put the picture away in my pocket as though it belonged to me.

"Don't you see?" he said loudly. His voice cracked.

"My dear fellow, I see *nothing!*" I shouted.

"That man is my father. Or rather, that man is my identical self. And this woman—" He swung to point at her. "This woman is my mother, my wife, my sister. We're not *human,* Dr. Thorpe. We're *copies!—clones!*"

"Stark mad," I whispered and clasped my hands tightly.

"Miserable, but not mad," he cried, dashing away from me, pacing in strides that would have been comic were they not so outrageously full of woe. "I can multiply my body and soul indefinitely—or any human being's. I've lived twice already. I have fleeting memories of people dead a hundred years ago. Imagine, Doctor! There could be a thousand John Hunters!" He laughed wildly at the horror of the thought. The laughter arched out toward the storm like a lost soul's screech.

I refused to be terrified. I did not believe him.

"You're incredulous," he said, "but I can prove every word of it, to the last syllable! I can show you my machines, my papers. Come!" He leaped at the woman and snatched her hand, dancing crazily past me. She threw me a wide-eyed imploring look, like a helpless animal in flight from dogs, but there was nothing I could do. I avoided his hand when he snatched at me.

I said firmly, forgetting all fear of him, "Hunter, you're mad."

"Yes, mad, God knows! But every word of my incredible tale is true. Mad as Faust—nay, mad as Lucifer! But I've told you no lies, if there's any salvation in that, sir. Follow me!"

The storm was growing worse. He stood stamping by the door like a lunatic child, his white hand clamped around the woman's. With every new gust, the whole house cracked and shuddered. I could swear there was flame in his eyes.

I said slowly, soberly: "Where *are* these machines and papers you mention?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"In the tower," he answered, and his crazy eyes were triumphant, as if I'd conceded.

"Impossible, then! Unthinkable! There's no place in all this country less safe. Calm yourself! Show me where the storm cellar is, and I'll inspect your materials tomorrow—if there's anything left of them. I'll look, I swear it. I give you the word of an official, licensed physician and veternarian."

But my sensible suggestion had no trace of effect. Some demon was in him, and nothing in ordinary humanity could any longer reach him.

"Dr. Thorpe, I beg you!" he wailed, and reached for my hand again. His whole body shook. Tears streamed down his cheeks. Even she—his mother, as he insisted on calling her—was wavering and surely in a moment would convert to his side.

Life, as I have said, is preposterous. Heaven knows what came over me. All my personal fear, all my lifelong good sense were overwhelmed by the pitiable spectacle before me: they seemed all at once neither human nor monstrous but merely outcasts of Nature, clinging to each other, hand in hand, and looking up to me imploringly for help. Before I could change or even know my mind, I took one step toward them, and in that step gave up and followed.

7

THE DOOR through which they led me—the woman went willingly, eagerly—opened on a circular wooden stairway with a rail worn smooth by many climbings in the night, a pitch-dark room as airless as dreams of the grave. At what was perhaps the third turning, I saw light above, frail and unearthly—the lumination of the storm. It grew brighter, more ominous. I could feel the giddying sway of the tower. But at last we arrived, despite all that—came out into the world of Hunter's ungodly laboratory.

It was not the machines I looked at first—great square black boxes over operating tables, glass walled vats, cramped chemicals and tubing—though Hunter ran to them immediately. Most of the room's south wall was a window, and the spectacle that window conveyed to us now is one I pray never to be witness to again. The churning sky was the unholy purple of glass balls on a lightning rod. The bloom of the lightning was virtually continual: it was like watching flames touched by cobalt and copper, but watching from deep within them. The torches Hunter had lit near his machines were a tragicomic mockery, a human shout against the fury of breakers on a rocky coast. And Hunter was, I saw, shouting to me now. I could hear, against the roar of the storm, not a whisper. Sparks and reflections of sparks danced wierdly in the room as he turned a great brass crank on the largest of the two machines. I glanced again at the window, then back at the machines and at the stacks of journals and loose papers in the glass-doored racks beyond. Suddenly, for no conceivable reason—unless imagination is the soul of judgment, and things in the world (black boxes, books) are the heart and soul of imagination—I believed him for an instant—believed he was, as he claimed, not human, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neither was she.

Then it came. All three of us heard the sound at once. My blood congealed. It was a noise like a thousand railroad engines, every one of them with its whistle blowing. It was the voice of the cyclone, or of God, as the woman fancied. I cannot swear that my eyes really saw what I think I saw when I turned to the window. I seemed to see not one cyclone but four, creatures more terrible than the Bible's Four Horsemen, close at hand now and moving toward us as if sentient: four black giants that towered above us to the beams of heaven, swaying like witchdoctors, watching us, moving with terrible purpose toward our tower. I stood wide-eyed, stunned. Now the woman—she who'd said so little before—was screaming like a belldame directly in my ear: "They've come! The Hounds of Heaven have found us! Forgive us, Thorpe!"

I rolled my eyes at her, my feet rooted to the tower floor. And then for some reason my nightmare chains melted and without pausing to waste one word on her I bolted to the top of the circular staircase and threw myself headlong down into the darkness, my only conceivable hope. As I fell, the tower was already giving way, tearing free like a tusk being yanked from its supporting bone. I couldn't tell whether the violent blows were the stairs, as I tumbled down head over heels, or falling beams, or bodies, or bricks, or scientific equipment; but I knew the great roar was like an awesome silence, and my lungs—nay, my very soul—screamed to heaven for air.

I lay . . .

The rest is confused. I have an image of papers and books rising up into the night like startled birds. So much for a lifetime's labor! But I can't have seen that, must have dreamed it.

I lay pinned under something, still conscious, it seemed to me, though I cannot assert as a medical man that the consciousness was not illusory. I felt the draw of the cyclone's heel, and things all around me rasped like snakes in a pit, and writhed and stirred. Then, it seems to me, I was crawling, and I came upon Hunter and seized his legs, trying to drag him to safety—to the house, perhaps. Part of it held fast. But I felt his death tremor, his violent jerking as he fought his way to a better world—and I released him in horror. In purple-green light I watched him cringe one last time, and jerk, and die. Then, not exactly with amazement, with—what?—I watched the dying body separate. It became several small creatures, pink, blue, green. (All this was surely not real, mere nightmare; but for certain reasons which will soon be evident, it is necessary that I record all I saw or thought I saw, on the chance that something in all this may give some hint of what actually took place.) I studied the creatures, so it seemed—I could hold four or five in my two cupped hands—and then I apparently lost consciousness.

How long my unconscious state endured I cannot determine. I awakened to what seemed to be screaming wind, but when I opened my eyes the day was beautifully bright, very calm and peaceful, a day to give philosophers hope and artists new purpose. Shakespeare stood above me,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looking puzzled and uneasy, still attached to what little remained of the gig. I had no idea where I was (I recognized at once that I'd suffered a concussion), and though I recognized Shakespeare as someone dear and familiar, I couldn't for the life of me recall his name. My head throbbed and my whole body ached when I tried to move; nevertheless, I managed to move my head sideways, and saw the storm's destructions. There was scarcely a brick or timber left of that once-proud tower, and the roof of the house had slid halfway off and lay cocked like a battered gray cap on a crumbling skull. It came into my bewildered consciousness that the screaming persisted, though it was not loud, and not wind. Slowly, painfully, I got my poor frame into a sitting position, then managed to get over on my hands and knees and drag myself, groaning and grimacing, in the general direction of the noise. Shakespeare watched, suffering for me.

As last, some forty feet from the ruin, I came to the open storm cellar by the graveyard fence. Inside it I found three small, wet bawling children, boys. They were all of them red-headed, buck-toothed, and pale as ghosts.

8

HOW I GOT HOME again is unimportant. I have been told by kind neighbors that it was the circling of vultures that signalled our distress. Despite their aversion to Hunter's house, the neighbors steeled themselves, knowing what harm that storm had done throughout southern Illinois (the town of Murphysboro was almost wholly wiped out; Boskydell, Jonesboro, and Anna were all severely damaged), and so, guided by our sheriff, they came to the ruin and rescued us—myself, the horse, and the children. No trace was ever found of the scientist and the woman nor, so far as I know, his books. The children were placed, for a month or so, in the home of a well-meaning, though stern and rather too-otherworldly old woman, a widow, sometime midwife. I recovered very quickly from my trivial discomforts—a dislocated shoulder, scratches and bruises like a newborn babe's, and a concussive bafflement that for two or three weeks blanked out all memory of the events of that night. The bewilderment I felt in that one connection had no serious effect on my performance of my duties. I walked, perhaps, more deliberately than formerly, as if feeling my way like a child; and at times I was conscious of a certain difficulty in remembering simple medical procedures that were normally automatic.

The situation with the children was more serious. It was a difficult case. I visited them three, four times a week—an eight mile ride in each direction, which fact I mention not to show my diligence but to suggest my concern and puzzlement. (We physicians are all to often maligned by those who confuse objectivity with callousness. We're as much like artists, it seems to me, as like scientists. Can any man of sober judgment assert that Mr. Poe, for example, does not vividly experience the anguish he so forcefully—and so objectively—portrays?)

Discounting the obvious evidence of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shock—blue nails, staring eyes—I could find nothing physically wrong with them. There was no vomiting, no bruise or bump to suggest that they were lost in the timelessness of skull-fracture. Yet their eyes were full of terror, as if witness to things too monstrous to be recalled. Like the Albigensian initiates of old, they refused to eat, refused to confess to any feeling of pain or pleasure. They would recognize neither the old woman nor myself, indeed, seemed not even to recognize their own reflections in the mirror.

The old woman stood hunched at the bedroom door, her crooked frame draped in Bible black, her dim eyes like nests in a dying tree. Outside their window it was bright, breezy June. Shakespeare stood nibbling at the leaves of a magnolia, turning his nead now and then to discover if I were coming. I sighed, lips pursed, shaking down the thermometer, snatching in the back of my mind for something I'd known once, some long-forgotten trick like Mino's multiplication. Their temperatures were normal, except that they were identical—for some perfectly natural reason, no doubt, though it was queer, in fact damned eerie. The old woman's white, arthritic hand gave a jerk, and I glanced at her over my glasses. It jerked again, the crooked index finger raised as if signaling me near. Still frowning, I left the three staring red-heads and went over to her.

"Mab!" she whispered, or perhaps she said *mad*. Her toothless gums left the word uncertain.

I nodded, merely thoughtful, not necessarily indicating agreement.

She whispered something like, "My sister's baby was mad, over thar in Missoura." She dabbed with a wrinkled gray hankie at her mouth.

"I'm sorry," I said. My mind was still on the case, not her words. The old woman smelled of cabbage and crabbed age. They can't help these things, the elderly. But I was eager enough to be rid of her, and shut of her opinions.

"Cured it," she said, and beamed at me.

Again, meaning nothing, I nodded. I glanced back over my shoulder at the children. They lay as before, motionless as corpses beneath the frayed gray sheet, their red-rimmed eyes staring, full of terror. The old woman said something more to me, snatching at my sleeve as a child would, but I did not catch the exact words: "Yes, good," I said impatiently.

I took a small vial of pills from my medicine bag on the chair. Sedatives. It was the souls of those three lost children that were unquiet, not their bodies; but I had no medicine for the human soul; a doctor must treat what he can get to. I gave the pills to the widow, along with instructions, then nodded, said good-day to her, along with a word to the children—"Obey Mrs. J—, I'll be dropping in again," or some such—and I left.

I said nothing whatever to Shakespeare, riding home. I drove to the barn, unharnessed him and fed him, gave him a solemn pat on the neck and nodded as I'd done to the old woman, then walked back over to the house, reaching in my pocket for my key as I went. It was not in the pocket I expected, and I reached inside my coat, pausing on the porch now and gazing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

absently over the hills, bright green—a thousand shades of green. My groping hand came to the picture I'd gotten that night from Professor Hunter, and alarm shogged through me before I even recognized what it was my fingertips had brushed. "Clones!" I whispered. The hills were suddenly a mockery—joyfully, meaninglessly green, an ironic comment on the dreadful abandonment of those awful creatures in the bed. I didn't need to think to perceive their situation, or lack of it: they were, all three of them, John Hunter cruelly resurrected.

I should of course have known it at once, from the instant I first laid eyes on them. But remember, to me they were not words on a page, as they must be to my reader, who sees all this more rationally, from a distance; they were children—flesh and blood lambs of God. My spirit shrank back with every particle of Christianity in it, and I fumbled through the rest of my pockets, sick with anxiety, as if, if I could not find that key to my door . . .

I found it of course. Was it merely my imagination that the sky had gone darker, lost luster, as if . . .

No matter. I was not put on earth to be physician to skies. I understood perfectly well now the terror in those unnatural, hunted eyes; understood it and was impotent to deal with it. How he'd done it was unimportant to me. Let scientists deal with the mechanics of it, if any there be who care so little for their immortal souls.

Like any in a daze, I groped to the chair where normally I spend my evening with poets, with philosophers, occasionally with my father's beloved theologians, long-dead creatures exactly like myself—or dead, nonexistent till my eye revives them—and I charged my pipe, took my shoes off . . . He had spoken of memories, phantoms of his own former life. She'd wrung her hands, I remembered. No wonder.

For there was no mistaking the cold evidence of the deguerrotype. The short, neat beard of the original John Hunter and the wild streaming chaos on the second one's chin, the dimpled white chins of the three small children—they did not hide that unspeakable identity of eyes, nose, teeth. Gruesome outcasts, fiends in human shape!

The night was sullen and overcast, a night, I'd have said, to furbish the unhealthy souls of Mr. Poe or the author of *Macbeth*. My horse was irritable, indignant, but I drove him cruelly, forgetting all former good will, never permitting him to slack, old and weary as he was. His hooves rang out in the bandoned darkness. He got his second wind; his mane and tail streamed out like those of a younger or infinitely older horse, the terrible black the Devil drives. Where the road went under trees, the night was so dark I had nothing to tell me the horse was still there but the clatter of the gig that stiffly, clumsily connected us. And so, near midnight, we came to the widow's house.

There were no lights, no sounds of life. I hesitated, getting down from the gig, checked, it may be, by something deeper in my soul than mere justice or charity. But I overcame the debate going on, unheard, in what ever must pass for the heart of man, and,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

snatching my whip from its rack (I have no idea why) I hurried to the old woman's door. I knocked twice, loudly, with the butt of the whip, then paused, listening, then knocked twice again. (I did not relish that terrible silence. We weren't yet shut of tornado season.) Again I knocked, and this time, the third, a voice called out, and soon I heard the creaking of a door, within, and her shuffling, slippered feet. It was a sound like hard, irregular breathing. She fumbled with the latch, got the wooden bolt back, and with a little whimper tugged the door inward. She looked up at me in alarm, knotty hand on her bosom. In her other hand she had a candle.

"I've come for the children," I said.

"Oh, it's *you,* Doctor!"

"Whom on earth did you expect?"

She seemed to try to remember, then shot me a cunning look. I looked past her, searching the dim and flickering room. I knew, suddenly, that something had happened. I'd stood here before, peering over the old woman's shoulder, sweeping my gaze over kitchen pump, crockery, table, wired-up chairs . . . There was some object on the table, a ghastly gray thing like a shrivelled head, and there was string, a butcher knife, several pieces of damp cloth. I pushed past her and stepped to the table, my boots loud as thunder on the hollow floor. It was a root, a mandrake. I turned in rage. "What have you done with them?"

Her gnarled hand trembled like a tree in high wind, and her cracked face was yellowish green in the candlelight. She gave a moan, a kind of wail with words in its, jumbled, anile, helplessly tumbling. I stalked past her, making sure the three children were not in their beds (though I knew they were not; I'd been through this before). The bedroom window was open, screenless. I leaned out, trying to remember what to do, and in the almost perfect darkness—no moon, no stars—I found a center, a patch so dark it had to be an object—yet I knew there was no tree in that place. My heart thudded at the walls of my chest with such force that I couldn't stand upright. And then the black thing whinnied—Shakespeare, much closer than I'd guessed, standing next to the wellhouse. Suddenly I remembered what had lain there struggling in the back of my mind—the old woman's mumble on my earlier visit: the Indian mandrake cure.

"Witch!" I whispered, turning from the window. I was angry enough to have struck her with my whip, but no time for that now. I stormed past her and out into the darkness and over to the well's stone wall. After a moment my groping hand found the crank, and, slowly, as carefully as you'd handle a scalpel, I brought up what hung below. The old woman stood at my shoulder with the candle, whimpering for forgiveness, as they came in sight. Three staring children, all mad as the moon, fiercely gagged and tied in the copper washing tub that was to support their difficult journey from the world of demons to the world of men. I swiftly untied first one, then another, and started on a third when my hand paused, swifter than my mind. He was dead. I felt the same shock I'd have felt if he were human. I looked up at the widow. She too had seen it. Her mouth

(cont. on page 121)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BUT THE OTHER OLD MAN STOPPED PLAYING

Sometimes the piper calls the tune that he can no longer avoid. . .

C. L. GRANT

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

He was getting lonely, and he didn't like it. It made him think of dying. But Nikos, he told himself, you're not alone. You have your sheep. Only, the sheep were leaving and he didn't know how.

It didn't make much difference at all to him whether or not he was the last man on Earth. Since he was unable to prove it one way or the other, he seldom thought about it, knowing it would have been a pointless waste of all the time from sunrise to sunset he had to himself. Though in the beginning he had been tempted to build a raft and ride the jagged coastline, he feared what he might find would be cousin to his nightmares. He had been alone before; he was alone now. To consider that there was no one left to visit him, though no one ever had, didn't change a thing. For a while he had had the radio, but in what might have been the remote past (he didn't know or care) his radio stopped receiving even static and was now serving poorly as a rusting decoration. It wasn't a great loss. It hardly ever worked.

However, not thinking of what he had once called his lastness did not enable him to discover how and why his sheep were disappearing from his valley.

If there were no longer any people, that was fine with him. He really did not mind except that those he had no use for were also dead, and for that small blessing he was, not thankful, but pleased. No pity, or sorrow, or twinges of horror at the manner of their dying; just a vagrant feeling of frustration now and again because he hadn't been allowed to do the job himself.

And since it was useless to do

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

otherwise, he sat quietly, ignoring the uncomfortable boulder that served as his chair, and the Aegean that lapped weakly beneath his clumsily shod feet. There was no sense in scanning the horizon for ships, or in looking left and right along the sandless coast. No reason for him to be there at all except that his hut was too cramped on sunlit days when the sea-mountain air smelled fresh.

For nearly a full minute he allowed himself to desperately yearn for an overflowing glass of ouzo, or even some of that cheap Turk wine he had sold; but he had long ago given up wishing for sea nymphs to cater to him.

A dirge wind, limping from its rocky journey over Thessaly, made him pull the collar of his shirt over his neck as if the uncut, thickly curled black hair wasn't enough to protect him. His beard itched.

"Theos," he muttered without believing.

Finally, when the sun ricocheted off the water into his eyes, he resurrected a memory: elephantine Ditkas wallowing in his fine home in Corinth, built partly from the ruins of Nikos' inability to maintain a simple, honest restaurant. For hours Ditkas had tutored him, his voice oozing like oil through the folds that swung from his chin, and Nikos had listened carefully and had thrown it all away the moment he left the mansion. Instead of tourists he catered to the locals and charged them fair prices and let them break glass. His was a fine place, a happy place, right up to the end when he could no longer pay the interest to the money-lender.

"You're a poor, miserable busi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nessman," Ditkas had sneered from behind a shark-smile. "You care too much for people, and you'll never learn they don't give a damn for you. You're a fool, Notopoulos, and I'm not a bit sorry to take your money."

It pleased Nikos to picture the obese man, reeking of garlic, floundering in the acid of his own dissolving flesh. A beautiful death, he said to himself as he did each evening, worthy of the most exquisite of hells. And a proper justification for a war.

The sea sprayed him lightly and the boulder became treacherously slippery, but he had a ritual to complete.

Stephan Politos: wife-stealer, tourist-robber, rogue, rake, a thoroughly enjoyable son of a bitch. The Greek grinned and, rubbing a dirty finger vigorously across his yellowed teeth, spat into the water. Politos.

"I have some land," the short, handsome man had said one evening at a cafe. "It's good land, Nik, and would you believe no one wants it?"

"Yes."

"You think that's funny? I've been there, sure. But it's not my kind of place, you understand. It has rocks, thorns, lousy heat and stinking cold, but then. . ." He smiled broadly with a sweeping wave of his arm. "What the hell doesn't in this place?"

Politos was trying to get to France and Nikos hated him for it. Greece was good enough for all of them, even Ditkas, he thought.

They watched a chattering group of young Englishwomen taking pictures of the harbor. Politos muttered something and Nikos nodded, paying more attention to getting drunk before the sun went down than to the yammerings of a half-crazed Spartan. He had just lost another business that morning, and the woman he had been sleeping with had thrown him out when the word got around. And this one he had finally come to love. Now he was convinced there was nothing he could do right. He couldn't even get drunk in peace.

"I tell you, Nik," Stephan went on, grabbing his shoulder and grinning in what he imagined was a sympathetic manner, "I tell you, old friend, I'd gladly trade that land for your miserable apartment, no money changing hands, just beds. Well why not? You've had. . . let's see, there've been so many . . . you've had three restaurants and two bars and what did you get from them? A kick in the ass from that money-lender swine, that's what. Look," he said when Nikos turned to him slowly, "I'll even loan. . . no, we're friends. I'll give you the fare to get there, plus enough to buy some sheep or a couple of goats and food. Hell, you're my friend, right? Why the hell not."

"Too many mountains," Nikos muttered. He had gone to the priest but was told, with only surface politeness, that he first had to learn to love God more than Greece. He stared at the young man beside him and wondered how he had managed to become a part of his country. He snorted at the thought and Stephan immediately thought Nikos was relenting.

"Look, Nik, it's rough out there, I know. I tried living there but I have no patience with growing things. Now you, Nik, you could do it. No investment to lose; you don't like it you can always sell the sheep and come back. You're

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what, forty-eight? Not too old to start again. This is your chance, Nikos, to finally show all those bastards that you can be a success. I'm talking to you like a friend, a brother, Nikos. Why not, Nik. How about it? You say you love this damn country so much, out there you could write a book. How about it?"

So . . . he had done it, though he no longer kept track of how long ago it was. He forced himself to believe it was the only chance left he had. And it gave him twenty-five sheep, a rotting *zesti* clean enough for wild pigs only and— Nik nodded to the warm, too warm water that foamed around his seat. Rocks. Boulders. Stones. Barely enough to keep him alive. Some seed for vegetables that was a bit of foresight that had once made him proud and hopeful. The sheep had lived and he never knew how. They just did. If he were inclined to be religious, he thought, he would have called it a miracle.

Watching the red sun dive toward Italy, he grunted and shook his head, then spun on his buttocks and leapt to the ground. The wind shifted to keep at his back and he was tempted to stay and see the waves rise ponderously to meet it. But he was alone, and as it was when he had first arrived, he did not trust the dark. Especially now. Especially when his flock was shrinking without leaving a clue to its predator.

Politos. He hoped that when the war began the little bastard was in bed with some man's wife, poised and ready— and dead before he could finish. "I should have been a poet," he told himself as he walked. "I have such a flair for Homeric images." His sudden and welcome laughter strained to hold back the twilight and with it, some sun in the valley where he tried to live. But the mountains were too high, and their harsh beauty against the violently pink sky only partially cheered him.

The noise of the sea was gone, miles away, and there was nothing to replace it but the scraping of his wooden shoes on brittle rock. There was a day, not long after he stopped trying to raise Athens and Corinth on the radio, when a skittering pebble from under his foot would spin him into a crouch, staring into the dusk while he gripped his revolver. Nikos wondered if he had really been afraid then, and doubted it even though he continued to carry the weapon after the last bird had died quietly at the foot of a gnarled, spineless tree.

There were after all, he reminded himself, the missing sheep, now much more than companions.

"But what kind of monster," he said to his shadow, "would bother an old man like me?"

AFTER REACHING the floor of the valley he would not name, he looked to the stars and, unaccountably meaning it, whispered: "Home at last."

The *zesti* had been expanded by two rooms since his arrival: a bedroom without windows, with a stone and wooden framework for a bed where he'd piled sheepskin and soft water-reeds; and a store room where he kept the tins of food and slowly growing stack of farm tools. The front door had been enlarged so he could enter without stooping, and the dirt floor had finally been covered with smooth wooden

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

planks and tufts of wool to keep his feet warm. He grew accustomed to the smells, insects and drafts in winter; less a matter of survival, more a habit of escape.

After checking to see that the door was firmly latched, he walked around the low building to the pen, pushing aside the hand-tied gate and easing inside to count his sheep. They ignored him, barely moving to let him pass. He noted with pleasure how the lambs had grown, and the three rams' eyes were nearly hidden by dirty gray curls—they were his calender, summer was dying.

"All right, my children, don't get excited," he said gently. "Come on, little ones, stop moving so I can count heads." A finger jabbed quickly in the rolling darkness. "It was good of you to wait, not to leave before I came back. I sincerely appreciate your confidence in me." He paused, resting a palm on the butt of the revolver stuck in his belt. "Now, which of you wants to beard that thief, bait the lion? Come on, now, who wants to be a hero?"

The unnerving aspect of the thefts was the fact that only the rams ever sounded the alarm.

The old Greek continued the formalities of counting, already knowing the number. He had kept the flock at its original twenty-five, telling himself it was a lucky size. But his feelings of accomplishment were shattered when the first ewe, a yearling, disappeared. He blamed himself for neglect and stayed away from the sea for a week; but the thefts were patternless and ten more were gone. He searched the surrounding mountains for tracks and learned only what prints a sheep's hoof makes. They left in different directions and always, disturbingly, alone.

Nikos damned without feeling the French, Politos, the Americans, Ditkas and the Russians. It was a nightly exercise to soothe his temper; a faint, desperate prayer in the hope that they would all be there in the morning so he could spit and grind them under his callused heel.

"Bah!" he said in disgust. "I must be insane."

A GLINTING BLACK STREAM hurried across the foot of the valley. It was a cool, rare thing; and rarer still, a small stand of trees lined its banks. Nikos dragged the ewe to a lightning-scarred tree and tethered it so it could reach the water if it became thirsty. Then, kneeling beside it, he put an arm around its neck to calm it trembling. "I'll call you Stephan," he laughed softly. The wool was coarse against his cheek, soft in the food-and-dirt filled beard. "Don't be afraid, my pet. I'll protect you this time. It's about time, don't you think?" He hugged the animal, then stroked its muzzle. "I'm not the best shepherd in the world, little one, but if I don't bring you back, think how disappointed the rams would be." The sheep bleated and rolled its eyes. A hoof caught Nikos on the shin and he grinned to ease the pain.

When the animal relaxed at last and found the grass by the water to its liking, Nikos stepped across the stream on half-submerged rocks he had thrown there the spring before. Being careful that he could see the ewe from his position, he stretched and sat with his back against a tree. And waited.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The breeze was light, and the three-quarter moon stained the valley silver-gray. Leaves drifted in place, the sheep snapped a fallen branch and Nikos looked around in the dark, remembering what it had been like with evening birds.

He let his mind wander, dredging memories that threatened to fade into dust; he thought and the images broke slowly into fragments, motes of scenes with color blackened and feeling gone. Then he stretched his mind to cover the world, conjuring globes and maps and travel book pictures, trying to count the people who were left. But he was sure, more than sure that he didn't need them any more, just as they had never needed him. It was, he told himself, merely a point of curiosity, like waiting to see if the sheep were only wandering off.

He knew he was lying.

If he won the sheep game, there'd be plenty left for the spring lambing and he'd go on as he had, with the mountains and the sea; but if he won the people game, what; he thought, is there to win?

And he would not answer.

Suddenly Petro, the oldest ram, screamed a challenge and Nikos scrambled behind his tree. He knew he should have run immediately to the other sheep, but the ewe named Stephan did not stir. She wasn't deaf, he thought, and no dumber than most.

He waited, listening, and breathed in time to the stream. He felt nothing but the revolver in his belt.

The valley was quiet.

Petro screamed again.

"If it wouldn't be too much trouble," a shadow said sarcastically, "would you mind coming around into the moonlight where I can see you? I'm not used to being spied upon."

Nikos stood up slowly, leaning heavily against the tree.

"Come on," the voice said, more kindly. "I won't hurt you."

The Greek's chest contracted sharply, his forehead and palms shone even in the dark. The shadow cleared its throat impatiently and without warning, without caring or knowing why, Nikos began to cry, old man's tears he had wanted to weep for the war. And immediately he started, he was ashamed of his weakness and cursed himself.

Then, wiping his face with the backs of his hands, he stumbled across the roots and slid down the rocky bank to the stream. He ignored the stones as too slow, gasped when the icy water struck his knees. A hand, heavy and coarse, reached out and helped him, roughly at first until Nikos looked up, then gently. A palm cradled his elbow and he let himself be led to the outer rim of trees where, weak from something he was unable to name, his legs buckled and he was eased to the ground.

I dream and I'm awake, he thought.

The shadow crouched on its haunches in front of him.

"So," Nikos said, himself again and expressionless. "You're the bastard that's been stealing my sheep."

"Who has a better right?"

The Greek counted the years before he could answer. "Stand up," he demanded. "Stand out there away from the trees before I shoot you. I want to see you."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The shadow laughed loudly and trotted beyond the blanket of leaves. Moonlight twisted around the yellowing curls that covered its legs to the hip, bleached its powerful chest, tinted the blunted horns that poked through its hair. He turned to face Nikos, fists on hips. He spun around, posed and threw back his head and bellowed, eyes closed, teeth gleaming sharply white.

"Satisfied, shepherd?"

Nikos nodded dumbly. "So. I'm mad. I guess it was bound to happen to one alone for so long. I see a . . . a thing my mind says can't be there. But it talks, stinks and I suppose if I touched it it wouldn't vanish. But just the same, I'm mad. However," he said, "as long as you're here you might as well stay and keep me company. It's the least you can do after taking my sheep. Imagine. Imagine! Talk to me, satyr."

"What shall I say, old man?" The creature sat crosslegged in front of him, grinning. "You want me to say I'm sorry?"

"Well, aren't you?"

The satyr slapped its thighs and shook its head. "Amazing. My pride is stung, old man. You should be screaming in mortal terror and tearing your eyes out. I'm a myth, you know. Yet you sit there as if I were nothing extraordinary."

"Nothing is extraordinary to a madman," Nikos said. "I just never realized it before. Tell me, satyr, are you whatshisname? Pan?"

The man-god-goat's chest swelled, and Nikos woundered if all he could do with his fat lips was leer. "So you've heard of me after all. It's nice to know I'm not forgotten."

Nikos shrugged. "In books. Some read them, some don't. I did all the time, when there was nothing better to do. You know, you're not half as ugly as your statues pretend. Of course the lack of proper light might have something to do with that."

The satyr frowned and the Greek drew back slightly, afraid he might have pushed his dream too far. But nothing happened and as they stared at each other in silence he thought, unreal; we can't be the only two left.

Finally, in a voice that suddenly choked on the dust of the Acropolis, he said: "Where are the others, Pan?" And he winced at the satyr's expression because he thought a god could feel no pain.

"They. . .they gave up, old man. The wait was too long. The temples were dead. For all that, you're a better man than they."

Windless silence. The moon added pale fringes to the clouds that passed around it. Nikos fought to convince himself that this wasn't happening. He had seen too many ruins for it to be true, saw too many men and women and children with cameras who stole something from the marble every time a shutter clicked.

Petro challenged again and Pan roared back an answer that seemed to widen the valley with its power. Nikos clapped his hands on his ears and moaned; yet the satyr hadn't moved except to turn its head, barely open its mouth.

Wind, now, hissed through the dry grass.

"Shall I play for you, old man?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nikos looked up sharply and dropped trembling hands into his lap. A mutter of thunder echoed from beyond the mountains. For no reason at all he remembered a school book with pictures and stories he couldn't understand and thought were silly.

"Let me play for you, shepherd."

A forest scene: in pen and ink a satyr pursued a young woman, their expressions of lust and fear so grotesquely overdrawn he had giggled when he saw them and had been punished with a rod for disturbing the class and making light of the ancients. An American had once asked him about the gods and he had only shrugged, saying they were too old for anyone to care about.

"I promise you it will be beautiful, old one, and not the kind that has added fear to my name."

Suddenly Nikos was aware of a change in Pan's voice and he snapped his mind back to the grove and the smell of rain. From the perhaps-god the plea was almost laughable, like a child wanting to bring him to a place to be kept secret forever and ever. He tried to remember the story of the satyr's pipes, did, and found a cousin.

"She must have been very beautiful," the old man said quietly, thinking of the woman he had come to love and had been cast from.

Pan only shrugged and turned so that his profile was ringed with silver that winked on and off as clouds stopped to gather. From a small leather pouch at his waist he took a set of pipes, the syrinx, and shook it. "You're getting sentimental, old man. I thought you were as empty as the world out there, plowing your field and sitting on your sea-rock. Your sheep come to these, you know. Even a god must eat when there isn't any food." He paused, his eyes set unblinking on something in the evening distance. "Can you tell me something? Can you tell me who is the bigger failure, Nikos Notopoulos?"

He played and the reeds jumped lightly against thick lips and rough hands, blending music into the darkness like dying sparks. The tune was unfamiliar and quiet, loud to the top of a whisper, soft to the beat of a feather. Nikos tried to let pictures form with the notes, and nothing came but darkness when the moon disappeared and thunder rumbled in from the sea.

Suddenly he was sure that Pan had been playing when the war came, had never stopped since the day he took up the syrinx from the ground and fashioned them into—what, old man? What is it you're hearing?

Lightning crackled from cloud to peak. He shut his eyes and wished he were with his sheep as he had always done in a storm, to talk with them and caress their backs, and laugh against the rising wind and the rain. They must be frightened, he thought. But who needs me more?

He opened his eyes just as a whip of lightning chased rain into the valley. Pan had not stirred—but he was old and hunched over, and Nikos drew blood from his lips to keep from crying out. Thick tufts of yellowing hair lay scattered on the grass, hooves were cracked and stained with dried blood, lips were formless, eyes dull.

The reeds were brittle, the notes like crystal. The music limped where it had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack Dann's stories have appeared, thus far, in Orbit, *several hardcover anthologies of original stories, and here ("Cartoon," Dec., 1971). His return to these pages is marked by a story of delusion and curious poignancy, a story about a strange girl named Joanna and a six-foot cat named—*

RAGS

JACK DANN

Illustrated by JACK DANN and MICHAEL NALLY

JOANNA HUDDLED AGAINST the side of a stairway leading into an apartment house and studied the brownstone buildings across the street. In the cinereal light of late afternoon they lost their formal structure. Grey buildings blended their lines with sky and concrete, leaving gaps in the smile of brownstones. She counted the stairways, just to see if they would make an even number: they didn't.

She thought about painting all the buildings yellow. That would clean up the street. Joanna wanted to paint everything yellow. Then everything would be all right and she could always remember nice things. She had yellow hair—proof that everything would be all right—but it was dirty and stringy. It would just take her a little longer to be lucky.

She stood up, waited the proper time, and then stepped into the street. Although the street was crowded, she didn't see anyone about; but then she never did. Joanna could not see other people. Joanna's streets were empty, except for garbage cans that occasionally rattled—she had decided that the wind made them jump—and parked cars. The cars were all dented, rusted, and discolored. Like everything else she could see.

She had taught herself a new way to walk; it wasn't that the old way didn't work—that worked sometimes, but not on the streets. She could not walk in a straight line without bumping into invisible beings. So she would stop and skip, sidestep, take a step backwards, perhaps run, or fall down and crawl into a cellar or alleyway. That was the new way she had taught herself to walk, and it worked very well. Joanna often had urges to simply walk a straight line, but she fought them down. She had to

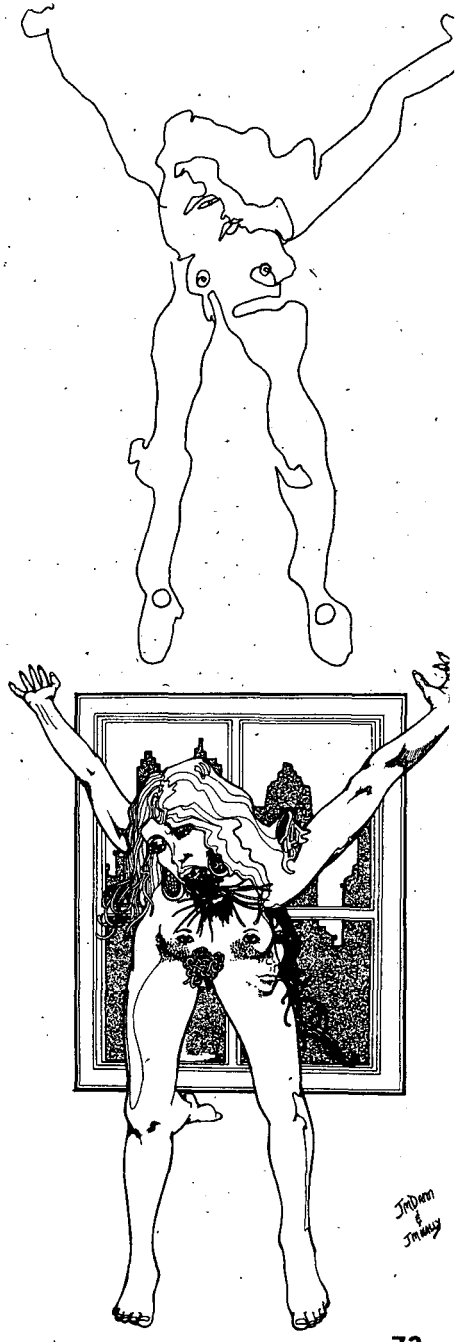
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

live by rules. Joanna made up many rules for herself. She didn't always know why, but that didn't matter—making up the rules was enough.

This time, Joanna took three steps, sidestepped toward the curb, then edged back toward the buildings on her left. But Joanna was too slow. Something bumped into her. She tried to move faster, but was short of breath. You have to eat more, she told herself. That was a new rule. Joanna could see an old neighborhood bar at the end of the street, its large window broken and opened cans and boxes scattered around the doorway. She knew the names of the street and the bar: the large street was First Avenue (she was walking on Tenth Street) and the bar was called *The Purple Cat*. There was no useable refuse here, no signs of life; the street was dead. Or almost dead.

A bottle crashed in front of Joanna, spraying the street with sparkles of glass. She looked up, saw nothing but window overhangs that looked as if they were stacked on top of each other. Something knocked her against the building. She slipped and fell. Can't stay here, she thought as she tried to stand up. She was nauseous and her ribs hurt. She had to hurry before something pushed her again.

Joanna walked as fast as she could. She stumbled and had to stop for a few minutes. She leaned against the only standing wall of a collapsed building. Joanna could not catch her breath; she was shivering and her face was flushed. You can't get sick, she told herself. That's an old rule. She tried to visualize herself running down the street, sidestepping back and forth, ducking in and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of alleyways, jumping off the curb and landing on her toes. Her face would be flushed and her hair long and clean and yellow.

But her face *was* flushed. That would make it easier to pretend. She pretended that she was not sick and hurried down the street, dreaming of pretty clothes and music. Joanna remembered that she had been sick before. She had the chickenpox and the flu, a cold every year, and the plague. No, she thought, I don't have that. Neither did her mother; she had already died. Remember Uncle Milton and Aunt Kate? Joanna always wanted to have big breasts like her Aunt's. She touched her chest, felt her small lumps.

Joanna was breaking the rules; she stopped remembering and concentrated on the street. This was First Avenue; she was safer on small streets. She could turn down Eleventh Street and hope it was better than Tenth. But Joanna felt sick; she could not pretend anymore. She had to stop, sit down, get food, get well, and get off the avenue; all at the same time, all equally important. Joanna forgot her rules. She touched her stomach, which was slightly distended, and giggled; then put her palm against her mouth to stifle her noises. She wasn't hungry.

Pretending she was in a safe cellar or alleyway, she sat in the street. She could not stay here. The thought was so obvious that disobeying it made her feel better. She was doing the impossible. She couldn't stay here, but here she was. And she was alive and not even hungry. The street looked different to her, clear in spots, yet obscured in others. Joanna could almost see moving shapes on the street; they dissolved before she could link them to memory. She focused on the cars and ashcans and paper birds that would soar a few feet in the air and then return to the ground to be newspaper animals, rolling around. This empty street was dangerous, meant scars and sores and death. But the street was already dead, except for the papers, and they would die when it rained.

She giggled: it had begun to drizzle. She was proud of herself—she could sit here in the street and face death. She heard a buzzing sound beside her. Joanna looked around, saw nothing out of the ordinary—the droning continued. It relaxed her, began to put her to sleep, although there was a small part of her that wanted to run. And that part screamed and shouted while she fell asleep. But she had fitted it into a sound-proof part of her head, somewhere just forward of her right ear.

WHEN SHE AWAKENED—she wasn't quite sure she had really fallen asleep—she saw a purple cat pacing back and forth in front of her. It stood six feet tall, had large almond eyes—they were blue, but sometimes turned green—and black markings on its face. Two lines, that turned out to be deep furrows, ran from its nose to the corners of its mouth, cutting its face into thirds, creating an appearance of age and wisdom. And it was definitely a male.

The droning took the form of voice, and Joanna accepted it as she accepted the cat. There would be no more rules. She knew that because she wasn't afraid of the cat or the voice or the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

street. It didn't matter that she felt sick; she was just weak, not nauseous.

"So you *can* see it, too," the voice said. "I made him out of the bar down the street. Take a look, the bar isn't there anymore. I used it all up. There wasn't anything in it, anyway. Why don't you answer me?"

Joanna noticed that the cat could easily look into first story windows.

"He looks in windows a lot," the voice said. "And he jumps on top of cars"—Joanna watched him leap atop an old Chevrolet convertable, pushing his foot through the soft top—"and sometimes crushes. . ."

She could not hear the end of the sentence. Some sentences just dangled, unfinished, merging into other ones just beginning, changing their accents and rhythms. It had begun to rain again, plastering the papers to the street, forming rivulets and pools that made gushing noises when they found their way to the gutter and finally the sewer.

"Come on," the voice said. "We can't sit here in the rain. That's dumb. I'm already soaked, and I'm scared sitting here for so long, even with Rags. That's his name." (Joanna stared at the cat, pronouncing his name over and over.) "Just sitting here with. . .you'd better say something. Do you want me to leave you here? Are you just stupid? I've got a place and everything and cans of food, and good locks on the door. It's raining too hard. Look at. . .are you coming?"

Joanna would allow the voice, but that was all. She could not answer it yet. The rain stung her cheek; it began to hail dirty crystals that bounced on the sidewalk. The sky turned dark, creating the illusion of twilight.

"I know you can see Rags. He's coming with us, look what he's doing to that. . ."

Rags walked slowly toward Eighth Street, once a colorful boulevard that sported theaters and crazily painted shops. A black cube, balanced precariously on its corner, had stood in the middle of the street. That was still there, further west, but not standing on its corner. Rags stopped at Eighth Street and waited.

The cat could walk a straight line, she thought, but she did not dare try it herself. She could only guess when to skip and sidestep. Joanna tripped and fell a few times; she was dizzy and weak and couldn't concentrate on her rules. But once she was behind Rags, he zigzagged back and forth, sometimes stepping off the curb, sometimes pausing. Joanna followed without tripping. She watched his tail—it pointed out directions. When it pointed up, Rags would take a giant leap and Joanna would follow with a smaller one.

The buildings were drab, but Joanna didn't want to paint them. They contrasted nicely with Rag's deep rich fur, made him look more solid and real. She splashed through oil streaked puddles. Although everything seemed to be occuring at a normal pace, Joanna dimly recognized that she was moving very slowly, lifting her feet with difficulty, and neither skipping nor kicking at the soggy paper birds.

"Hurry up, let me help you. We can't go so slow. It's that building down there, number 260.

"His name is Rags, did I tell you that? I named him that—watch out,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there—because I have a doll named Rags. It was a toss-up between the bar or the doll, and I wanted to keep the doll. So I used the bar. But I still felt badly about the doll so I named the cat Rags. That way the doll doesn't feel bad." A few more sentences passed, but Joanna couldn't hear them.

"Rags," the voice said. "Can you say Rags? R-A-G-S."

Joanna tried to blot out the voice. Of course she could say Rags. But once she said it, she would have to accept more things than she cared to. The streets might change their form and substance, and the voice might grow a body. And other things might take form, things that would be better left unsubstantial. The voice claimed it had created Rags, although it was probably the other way around, Joanna thought. The voice was too thin and tinny to create such a great, full-bodied animal. Rags was probably making the voice squeak just for fun.

"I'll have to shrink Rags before we go into the building. Once, he was impatient to get inside and got stuck in the doorway. I shrank him down to the size of a cockroach, just to teach him a lesson. And then I couldn't find him. I didn't have enough time to look because. . .still in the halls. . .there he was on the bed, jumping up and down on the pillow and smelling like flowers. That's the last time I ever fooled around like that."

And Rags began to shrink. Joanna patted his tail as it grew smaller. Don't listen to the voice, Rags, she thought. Joanna closed her eyes and tried to make him larger. But he was still shrinking. She thought that the voice was laughing at her, was afraid Rags might grow fangs. She followed him up the stone steps. He stood three feet tall under the doorway.

"It's on the sixth floor." A shadow was developing around the voice. Joanna would have to reckon with this voice, for it would soon grow a body. But that shouldn't happen, she thought—she had not said anything yet. She ran her hand along the worn wooden handrail and listened to her shoes tapping on the steps. Spiderwebs glistened in a small window overlooking a yard that was strewn with garbage and overgrown with weeds. A faint musty odor hung in the air, reminding Joanna of her grandmother's room. But she quickly forgot about that and sat down on the stairs. Joanna felt faint, her mouth was filling with acrid tasting saliva.

"Come on, we can't stay here." The voice, made visible by its shadow, moved toward Joanna. She would turn her face away and ignore it. Rags, resting on the step above her, touched her neck with his paw, then snuggled up against her. Joanna looked up at him, into his green eyes, and followed the lines and furrows that gave his face character. He seemed a little larger. I did that, she thought—he likes me a little bit. He smelled like flowers, bouquets of yellow flowers, just picked and piled in wicker baskets.

"Do you want me to carry you?"

Joanna shook her head, then caught herself. I must not answer, she thought—that would spoil everything. She tried to stand up, but was too weak: her knees buckled.

"See," the voice said as it extended a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shadow arm and put it around her waist. Joanna watched its fingers curl around her belt.

"You'd better let me help you. Do you want me to leave you here?" With that, the shadow grew fuzzy and the voice faint; but Joanna let herself be supported.

The voice lulled her, spoke soothingly; its shadow gradually transmuted itself into flesh. Once inside the apartment, Joanna found herself leaning against a young girl with long hair like her own. She wore faded dungarees, a tight orange blouse that showed off two bumps for breasts, and blue shoes. She didn't have a face yet, just a blank pink oval.

Joanna touched the girl's hair, smoothed it between her fingers, wanted to wash her face in it. And she fainted. But in the instant before her swoon, her eyes automatically scanned the room, turning objects into after-images: a worn oriental rug, two cushioned chairs, a mattress pushed against the wall, comic books in the corner, a writing desk with a hinged cover. She took these with her, rearranging them to fit her dreams, splicing and cutting, adding Rags and subtracting the girl.

She woke up to a blank face, eyebrows just beginning to sketch themselves in. "Are you hungry? I've got lots of food and medicines. Maybe you have the plague?" The eyebrows disappeared. "Don't worry, I can't catch it." But her hair was long and fell on Joanna's face. Long, thick, beautiful hair that curled at the ends, that felt cool and smelled like soap, that was yellow. And that meant luck and food and sleep.

"Say my name and I'll get you some food. Sandra. S-A-N-D-R-A. Say it."

Joanna simply nodded; she was not ready to talk yet. Sandra brought in an armload of cans, a can opener, and two spoons. She dropped them on the floor. "Well, what do you want? Soup? It tastes like scum; it's made out of turtles. This is caviar—the red stuff is better than that beluga. Those are artichokes; I never tried them. And liver pate, and lobster, and kidney parts—that's dog food, but the tuna isn't bad."

While she was eating, Joanna thought about Rags. Come here, Rags, she repeated to herself. Finally, he walked over to her, giving Sandra a wide berth. Joanna played with him, patted his ears, fluffed his fur; but Sandra did not seem to notice. Sandra pulled a chair to the window. Rags followed her. Joanna called him, but he would not turn around.

"Look. . .built a fire in the street. It's a big one. Come over and look. Come on."

Unable to hear all of Sandra's sentences, Joanna was growing impatient with herself. She wanted to hear everything, know what was going on around her. She moved to the window to be near Rags and watched the fire, feeding on itself, growing larger in the empty street. It spat flames at the dark faces of the brownstone buildings, set the windows aglow.

"Look what. . ." Sandra's hands crawled about on her lap. She stood up, imposing herself in front of the window, breathing two circlets of steam onto the glass. Joanna could not determine whether Sandra was upset or having a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good time (or both).

But the street really isn't different, Joanna thought, crouching in front of Sandra so she could see. The fire was getting larger, but it would be out by morning; she had seen other fires before—this was not unusual. She moved away from the window and called Rags, but he would not leave Sandra.

The apartment was a bit cool now. It was Autumn, although the city couldn't reflect the colorful palette of this season. The city was either cement sweating in the heat, or snow, dotted with soot, soon transformed into slush. But always grey, except for the nights, which traded one monochromatic monotony for another.

Shivering, Joanna curled into a ball. The mattress smelled. She watched Sandra moving about excitedly in front of the window. The glow from the street backlighted her into shadows. Joanna fancied she saw a bird, a dog, a pistol in Sandra's fluttering hands. All shadowforms. Rags jumped around playfully. He leaped on Sandra's head, balancing himself with one paw—his weight discarded—without distracting her from the fire.

Joanna called Rags, but he ignored her. Only when Joanna grew tired and closed her eyes, did he leave Sandra and settle down beside her. Joanna fell asleep, later awakened by a finger touching her hair, then a pale arm around her waist. Hair brushed across her face, and she dreamed that everything was yellow and long and flowing. She yawned and turned over, feeling fingers and palms, touching, pushing, circling, putting her into soft coma. She bathed in yellow hair, dreamed of Rags, and snored.

Later, Joanna woke up and saw Sandra standing before the window, squeezing her small breasts and looking toward the ceiling, then out the window. She was mumbling, "Rise tomorrow." Rags got up, stretched, and walked to the window. Joanna told him to come back, asked him, and then pretended to shout at him. He spat, bristled his fur, and returned to Joanna. When Sandra turned from the window, her formulary completed, Joanna feigned sleep.

SANDRA WAS BEAUTIFUL in the morning, Joanna thought. Her face, no longer a blank pink oval, was delicately molded; deep set eyes were accentuated by thin eyebrows—noticeably darker than her hair—that indicated the root of her long, sharp nose, her most prominent feature. But she was older, had had more time to be beautiful.

Joanna had begun to talk. But after an hour Joanna, suffering from dizziness and a headache, cut the conversation short by falling asleep. When she awoke, her headache relieved, it was still sunny; yellow bands streamed in through the dirty window while Sandra sprayed the walls and floor with an aerosol. Rags was sneezing and jumping about. As a test Joanna told him to stop. He lay down in the corner, his front paws curled under his chest. Joanna felt stronger.

"What's that?" Joanna asked.

"Bug spray. I don't allow any bugs in this room. I don't care if they're in the other rooms; I only live in this one. You want to see the bugs?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No," Joanna said. "Tell me what you were doing in front of the window last night. You were holding your tits and saying things."

"That's supposed to be a secret, but I might as well tell you—it won't make any difference, anyway. I make the sun come up by doing that. I do it every night. I invented all those motions, but they all mean something. Whoever was doing it before me is probably dead now. If. . .get him, then the plague probably did."

I want to hear everything, Joanna told herself.

"If the crowds didn't get him, then the plague probably did. But I'm doing it now. Anyway, I'm immune to the plague—it has to be me."

"I don't believe that. The sun comes up by itself."

"Well, it's true. You believe in Rags—nobody else can see him except you and me."

"That's different."

"And he's getting mad at you," Sandra said. "See, he's glaring at you. He wants to kill you because you don't believe me."

Rags snarled at Joanna. Teeth bared, claws extended, he circled around her. Stop it, she thought. Sit in the corner. Joanna started to cry. She closed her eyes very tightly.

"I'm sorry," Sandra said. "Rags isn't mad any more. See?"

"He's sitting in the corner," Joanna said, her eyes still closed.

"That's right. Stop crying and I'll show you the other room and the bugs. But I do make the sun come up. That's a secret; no matter what happens, you can't tell anybody."

She's too strong, Joanna thought. And she did make Rags. Maybe she could make the sun come up. But I made Rags sit in the corner. And I have yellow hair. Maybe if I wash it. . .

"I just make the sun come up. Somebody else makes it rain, somebody makes it snow. That's what keeps everything going. And when someone dies, or say, gets crippled or something, then someone else takes over. And so on., It's not as if I was making *everything* work."

Joanna nodded. She felt sick again. So she huddled into a ball, arms against her chest, knees touching chin: that felt better. I won't vomit, she told herself. It's only fever, not plague. Plague doesn't come and go like this. But everything would be all right. Sandra had yellow hair and made the sun come up; Joanna had yellow hair and would get well.

Joanna pretended she was asleep so that Sandra would not disturb her. By squinting her eyes, she could see Rags and still appear to be sleeping. She ordered him to skip around the room, to lie down, sit up, beg. Soon, Joanna was strong enough to make him snarl at Sandra. But that wasn't enough, she still wasn't sure of herself. So she made him urinate on Sandra's hair. But Sandra did not notice; she was too busy eating. Cans peppered the floor, luring the bugs from other rooms.

"Do you want to see the bugs now?" Sandra asked. Her hair was damp and clung to the back of her neck.

Joanna shook her head—she hated bugs.

"Well, you're going to."

"No," Joanna said. She was tired

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and comfortable, and getting well.

Sandra, the stronger of the two, pulled Joanna to the door. Joanna called Rags, but he would not respond—Sandra was too powerful now. "You've got to see the bugs," Sandra said.

"Why."

"Because I know you're afraid of them."

"How do you know that?" Joanna asked.

"Because I am, too. Everybody's afraid of bugs. That's why you've got to look at them and keep them around. They make you strong." Rags snarled and pawed at the door.

"I don't want to go in," Joanna said, but she did not resist. It would make her stronger. Sandra opened the door and Rags leaped into the room, squashing brown bugs, running after more, his mouth open and tongue lolling.

Garbage littered the floor and provided holes and folds to hide the cockroaches. There was no furniture. A calendar hung on the wall opposite the door, partly covered by a large flap of plaster that hung from the ceiling.

Joanna tried to make the insects disappear. She kicked a bottle, thinking it was alive. A huge, glass bug. There are no bugs, she told herself, only garbage. But the bugs remained and multiplied. They'll give me strength, Joanna told herself. She ordered Rags to wait by the door.

"There's water bugs in here, too. I imported them. Rags loves those best."

"No, he doesn't."

Sandra looked surprised. "Yes, he *does*. Look, see how he sniffs them out, then squashes them? He's squashing one right now, under the calendar. See that?"

"He's sitting by the door." Joanna felt stronger.

"Can't you see him?" Sandra asked. "He's tearing up bugs. That's it, you can't see him anymore. And you're afraid of the bugs."

Joanna felt something crawling up her leg, moving quickly past her knee. She slapped at it.

"See, you're afraid."

Rags snarled and exposed his claws, but Sandra didn't notice. "He's snarling at you," Joanna said, not quite sure who Rags was snarling at. "He hates you."

Joanna could feel insects crawling up her legs. She bolted for the door, but Sandra was blocking the way. Hoping Rags would not attack her, Joanna picked up a bottle and started swinging it in front of her. There were several cockroaches trapped inside it. She could feel insects crawling all over her.

Sandra backed away, but Joanna—caught in her own bloodlust—followed her. She struck Sandra across the jaw. The bottle shattered into sparkles of glass. Only the jagged neck of the bottle remained in Joanna's hand. Sandra covered her face with her hands as Joanna pushed the remains of the bottle into her throat. And twisted, as if she were neatly cutting out a piece of dough.

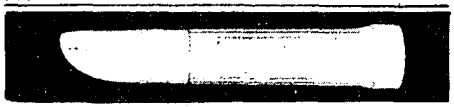
"You can't get out now," Joanna said. "And your hair's all red." Joanna looked for Rags. He was sitting in the center of the room, his head cocked to one side like a dog, watching. Joanna stepped to the door, opened it, and

(cont. on page 125)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems Needed
FOR SONGS & RECORDS

PUBLISHING CONTRACT guaranteed on selected material. Send your best poems or songs for FREE evaluation to: **HOLLYWOOD SONGWRITERS SERVICE, Dept. U-13 6253 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 1117, Hollywood, Calif. 90028 (Corner Hollywood & Vine)**



Cordless Electric Massager. Penetrating massage — gently and deeply like the touch of a million tiny butterfly wings working dexterously, expertly, excitingly to produce a variety of tension easing results! May use with cream. 7½". $5.95 ea., New World Co., 7247 Eccles, Dallas, Texas 75227, Dept. SF8-33

Free WITCHCRAFT COURSES

Learn the theory and practice of **WITCHCRAFT**. Obtain serenity and fulfillment. Send $1.00 for Serenity Guide, protective pentacle and course information. Write to

School of Wicca
P. O Box 693 St. Charles, Mo. 63301

POEMS NEEDED

FOR SONGS

★ TO BE SET TO MUSIC ★

All types for songs & recordings. *Records.* Send poems for **FREE EXAMINATION.**

ASCOT MUSIC INC. • Studio U-3
5904 Sunset Blvd., H'y'd, Cal. 90028

ACHTUNG!
REPRODUCTION GERMAN HELMETS

CHOPPER BARON
5161 Black.....3.95
5162 Chrome.....4.95
5163 Candy Apple ..4.95
5164 Metal Flake 4.95

1/8" Thick

CHOPPER WW II
5151 Black.....2.95
5152 Chrome.....3.95
5153 Candy Apple ..3.95
5154 Metal Flake 4.95

CHOPPER WW I
5149 Black.....5.95
Candy & Flake – Red, Blue, Orange

Includes Liner & Swastika Decals

Specify Color – Red, Blue, Orange

HERODIC CROSSES ON CHAINS

1½" – 5101 – 1.00
2" – 5102 – 1.50
5" – 5105 – 3.00

REPRODUCTIONS OF AUTHENTIC GERMAN MEDALS IN TIE TACK & LAPEL PIN SIZE.

$1.00 Each

5112

5113

Orders under $10.00 add 50¢ per order – No C.O.D.'s

Adolf's
2607 Hennepin Ave. So.
Minneapolis, Minnesota
55408 Dept. H33

BACK ISSUES S F MAGAZINES

AMAZING and FANTASTIC (1963–1970), S F GREATS, THRILLING S.F., S F ADVENTURE CLASSICS, STRANGE FANTASY, SPACE ADVENTURES, SCIENCE FANTASY, ASTOUNDING S F, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES YEARBOOK—1970, THE STRANGEST STORIES EVER TOLD, SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS—MOST ISSUES AVAILABLE (65¢). ULTIMATE PUB. CO., BOX 7, OAKLAND GARDENS, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11364.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILMAR H. SHIRAS

Mrs. Tokkin is back again with another of her improbable but oddly convincing stories about the Professor. (The first of her tales was "Backward, Turn Backward" New Worlds of Fantasy #2; "Shadow-Led" and "Reality" appeared in the October, 1971 and February, 1972 issues of this magazine.) This time the Professor has become fascinated with—

BIRD-SONG

Illustrated by JOE STATON

"YOU WILL FIND your new pet very interesting," Mrs. Tokkin approved. "I raised canaries at one time."

"Then you can tell me all about how to take care of Dicky," I said. "Wait until I put the kettle on, won't you?"

When I came back with the tea-tray, Mrs. Tokkin was whistling—I almost said warbling and rolling—at Dicky, and, with his head on one side, he was listening intently. Then he seemed to answer her with a full burst of song.

"I believe," I said with a laugh, "that you can speak the language of the birds. What were you saying to Dicky?"

But Mrs. Tokkin explained, "I learned to whistle a few imitations."

"Do birds have a language, I wonder?" I asked, when the kettle had boiled and the tea was poured.

"Not as we understand the term," said Mrs. Tokkin. "They are bird-witted, you know."

"Did you ever have an adventure concerned with birds?" I asked hopefully.

"No," said Mrs. Tokkin, "I don't believe I ever did. Thank you, my dear," as she accepted a slice of pound cake. She ate a bite or two before adding, "There was, of course, the time that the Professor became a bird."

IT WAS (said Mrs. Tokkin) at the time when I was raising canaries. The Professor had been away for a time, and when he came back he found that there was a terrible epidemic of influenza in town, and a good many people got pneumonia or pleurisy also. I was one of them, and I was very ill indeed. Paul brought in our best singer, Dark Richard, hoping that the bird would cheer me up, and indeed I found him good company. He sang and sang, and I coughed and coughed. Soon I noticed that he had a new song, a loud repetition of the same note, for the most part, and then a little grace note,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the loud note over and over again. I began to wonder what he was singing. I was thinking about it when the Professor came in.

He was horrified to find me so ill, and promised to fetch me some medicine.

"Don't go yet," I begged him. "Sit down and listen to Dark Richard. What can he be singing, do you suppose?"

"What do you mean?" asked the Professor. "I thought that canaries had a regular song of their own."

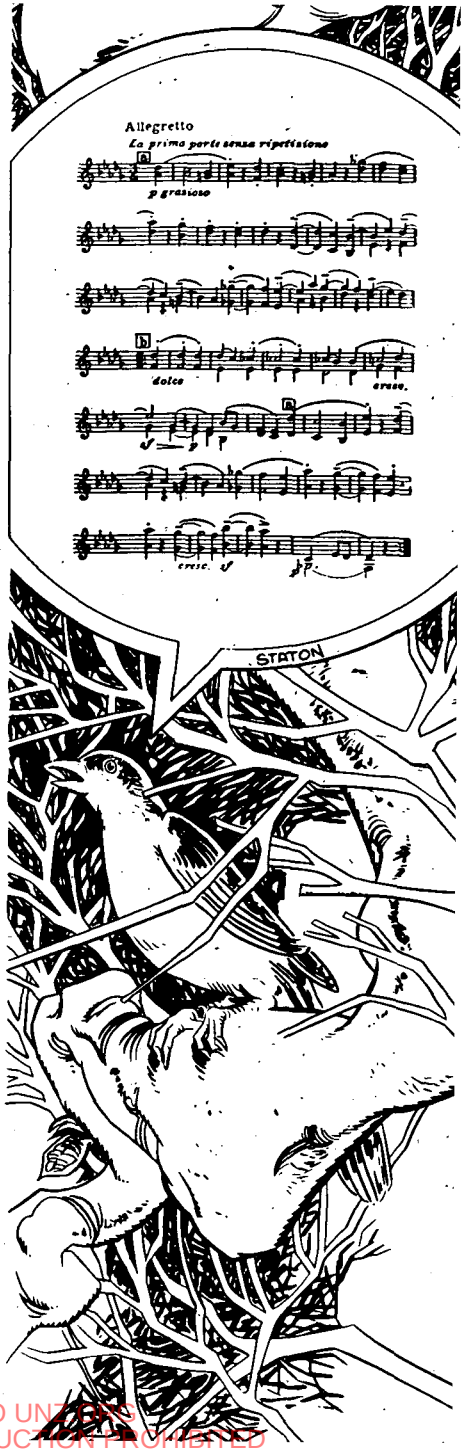
So I explained that Dark Richard sang everything he heard. He sang the regular canary songs, rolling, warbling or chopping as he chose, but he also sang lawn-mowers, typewriters, children shouting and playing, cars going up hill and changing gears, and a variety of other things.

"You mean he imitates them, like a parrot?"

"No," I said. "He hears them and sings them. Sometimes it is quite difficult to figure out. Madge Brann, who lives in the country, was furious because her neighbor has turkeys. All her pedigreed rollers began to sing turkeys, and it ruined their song for show purposes. But you would never have mistaken it for a turkey. There he goes!"

The Professor could make nothing of it, although he listened carefully.

And then I began to cough. Dark Richard sang all the harder for that. I coughed, caught my breath, coughed again. Richard kept on singing. And suddenly I began to laugh, and I coughed and laughed and choked until the Professor, somewhat alarmed, said, "I'm going to get that medicine," and started for the door.

"Wait—oh, wait," I gasped. "Listen

LICENSED TO UNTERRIS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Richard! He's singing my cough!"

The Professor listened, with his eyes and mouth wide open.

"Why, so he is!" he said. "That grace note—it's where you catch your breath!"

He came back and sat down, mopping his brow.

"You mean," he said, "That a canary thinks you sound like that? Or is that the nearest he can imitate it?"

I shook my head.

"How would I know what a canary thinks?" I asked. "He takes everything he hears, even the ugliest noises, and somehow transmutes them into music. That is what makes him so interesting. Richard is an exceptionally fine singer."

"Will this ruin his song?"

"For show purposes he was ruined long ago. But I'd rather he sang all kinds of things," I said heretically. "Anything he sings is beautiful. Especially when you hear what he can make out of some horrible racket like a steam riveter, or a bad cough!"

At that I began to laugh again, which made me cough so much that the Professor got up and marched firmly out the door, to return in a few minutes with a medicine-bottle in his hand. But that medicine, as Kipling used to say, is another story.

I was feeling much better by evening, although still weak, as the Professor had warned me I should be.

"You must stay in bed for a few days, and rest," he insisted.

Then he looked at the bird.

"Will he remember that song, and keep on singing it?" he asked.

"Probably not," I said. "He sings things when they are going on, and right after. When the baby was sick, last year, nothing would content her but that I should sing her favorite song by the hour. I sang and whistled and hummed 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,' over and over. One day Dark Richard began to sing it, and he certainly showed me how it should be done! You never heard anything like it! 'Melody with variations' to make the world's finest musicians cut their throats in despair of ever equalling it."

"Humph," said the Professor. "And then he wouldn't do it again?"

"I suppose he would, if I sang the same song for a week without stopping," I said. "Somehow I don't want to try it. I got so sick of 'Twinkle, Twinkle' that I haven't sung it since the baby got well."

The Professor stared at the cage for a while, and then changed the subject. He said he wished he had not been away, as he ought to have given me the medicine days before.

TWO EVENINGS LATER he came over again.

"I have decided," he said, "to become a bird."

Paul was a little surprised at this, and asked the Professor what he had said.

"I will become a bird," said the Professor, a little impatiently. "I need your help, and also your consent."

"Anything we can do—" I assured him.

"I want to enter into a bird, to hear what the bird hears, and to see how it comes out as music," explained the Professor. "Someone must care for my body meanwhile, and keep an eye on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my house also, as you have done while I have been away. Someone must be ready to set the proper drug before me when I wish to return to my own body, to release me from the body of the bird. Also, you have birds. I ask your permission to enter into one of them. Shall it be Dark Richard here? Or if one of the birds in the aviary outside, someone should catch me and separate me from them in order to provide me with the drug to change me back. Well?"

Paul lighted a cigarette and smoked thoughtfully for a time, while the Professor and I debated the advantages and disadvantages of the plans he had suggested. To be honest, I did not want him to experiment with, or should I say in, Dark Richard, although I did not care to say so.

Then Paul cleared his throat.

"I wouldn't be a canary at all if I were you," he said.

"My mind is made up," said the Professor. "I am not at all afraid for myself. If you are afraid for one of your good birds, I will enter into another singer, one you intended to sell. You will not refuse an old friend this small favor?"

"Wait a minute," said Paul. "You've got me wrong. I wasn't thinking about what might happen to the canary. You're welcome to them all, as far as I am concerned."

"I should say so, indeed," I said, remembering how much more I cared for the Professor than for the bird. "It really should be the best singer."

"If I were you, Professor," Paul went on, "I wouldn't be a canary. Richard isn't bad as canaries go. He's the smartest canary we've ever had or heard of. But you'd do better to be a mocking-bird."

"A mocking-bird?" said the Professor. "That is an excellent idea. Do you have a mocking-bird?"

"There's one outside," said Paul. This, my dear, was when we were living in Long Beach. "Mockers are not afraid of man or beast. He can fly around all outdoors, and you could get about the neighborhood and hear whatever you like. You could have the pleasure and freedom of flying, too."

"What a wonderful idea," I exclaimed. "Be that mocker out here, the one who taught Richard to sing."

"Tell me," said the Professor, his bright eyes alert.

"When we first had birds," I told him, "we had only one pair. This mocker used to come every day and sit on the telephone post and listen, and sing. He learned Goldy's song, and sang it as well as Goldy did and twice as loudly, before spring was over. Goldy and his mate had three babies, and just as Dark Richard, the male baby, was old enough to learn to sing, Goldy went into the moult and couldn't sing a note. But the mocker came back in August and sat on the low fence-post in the back yard, and began to repay the lessons he had taken in the spring. He'd sing a few notes, and wait for the baby bird to repeat them, and then he'd sing again to correct him, and then a few more. Male birds always teach their own babies, but I never heard of one teaching someone else's babies, of another kind, like that. He gave regular daily lessons just like any other papa."

"And then he'd end up with a real concert piece to show his pupil what he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had to work up to," Paul added. "Magnificent! He kept that up every day all through August. That bird had personality, too. During the nesting season he and his mate wouldn't let our cats out of the house."

"Actually?"

"Actually, with bells on," said Paul. "They'd swoop down and peck at the cats until the cats got so they wouldn't go out of the door. You should have seen our big old tom, the terror of the neighborhood, cowering while they both beat him with their wings, and then they'd fly off, cawing like crows, just as if they were giving him the laugh."

"Shall I ever forget the day," I said, "when poor Tom was sleeping on the side fence, good as gold and bothering nobody, and one of those mockers flew down and grabbed a big bite of fur off his back right at the base of his tail. Tom was so sound asleep he didn't know where he was, and he jumped up and turned around all in one movement to claw at whatever had bitten him, and he fell right off the fence and landed on the ground with a thud. The mocker flew off jeering for all he was worth, and poor Tom limped into the house and wouldn't go out again for a week."

"Well! well!" said the Professor. "Such a bird would be a splendid host, I can see. If you will be good enough to point him out, I will occupy his body for a time. Probably a week would be long enough; perhaps longer, if I find it profitable. Where is this bird? Can he be depended upon to be in a certain place at a certain time?"

"He comes to the crumbs we throw out for him on the feeding-table by the bird-bath," we assured him.

"It's the same bird, all right," Paul added. "I hear they stake out a land claim."

"I will study his habits and let you know before I make the change," said the Professor. "He must be in sight when I'm ready to move in. I'll be in my house, at a window. When I leave my body, it will fall, probably into some position which would be cramping to awake in a week later. You might lift it on to my bed, or at least lay it straight, and perhaps cover it up in case of cool nights."

We said we'd be glad to attend to it.

"And the antidote—the drug to release me again—you can mix with some bread-and-milk when it is time for me to take it," continued the Professor. "I will give you enough for several doses, so that if I do not eat the first when you prepare it, you can provide another daily until I do eat it. It may be difficult for us to communicate. Have you any suggestions?"

"You might sing some appropriate song," said Paul, "Say, 'Little Brown Jug' when you want a drink."

This led to more and more silly suggestions and much laughter, until the Professor climaxed it by expressing the hope that we wouldn't hear him trying to render "I Cannot Sing the Old Songs."

The Professor gave me the drug, with careful instructions as to the dosage, and it was agreed that he would tap on the window-pane if he wanted it before the week was up. If he did not give this signal, I was to offer the drug at the birds' feeding-table after a week had passed, and every day thereafter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What if wild birds should eat it?" I asked.

"It should not harm them. Nothing at all will happen, since, presumably, no human soul dwells within them awaiting release."

The possibilities this remark suggested were amazing, and Paul and I toyed with them in our imaginations for months afterwards, but, my dear, this is a very dull factual story, and, not to disappoint you, I must say at once that nothing even remotely of that sort took place.

AT THE APPOINTED TIME, the mocking bird made his usual sunset visit to the table, and then flew to his usual bush where he sang his usual song. The song was interrupted midway by a terrific squawk, and we saw him jerk abruptly as if to fall. He fluttered his wings wildly, regained his balance, gave a couple of clucks, and was silent.

"That sounds like the appointed moment," Paul observed and we went next door and put the Professor's body on the bed, taking off his shoes and covering him with a blanket.

The next morning when we looked out of our bedroom window, the bird was on the feeding table, pecking at last night's crumbs and making ill-natured noises.

"I don't think the Professor likes his breakfast," Paul commented.

"Poor thing," I said, and went for the garden fork.

When the Professor saw me coming, he hopped toward me, and I put down a saucer with two nice worms for him. He was on the edge of the saucer before I had put it down.

"There!" I said.

He gave me such a severe peck on the back on my hand that I cried out in pain.

Paul at the kitchen window was in spasms of laughter, which was most unsympathetic, for my hand was bleeding. I sucked the wound, and the Professor began to sing loudly, but if his song meant anything—apology, reproof, or a request for other food—I could not understand it.

"What do you feed the canaries?" asked Paul when I came in. "Try some on him."

"Mixed seed, of course," I said. "He probably would not know how to crack them. He might not like them, anyway. I also give them apple and orange and banana, and hard-boiled eggs, and bread-and-milk, and dandelion greens—"

"I don't believe he would care for dandelion-greens, raw," said Paul. "If he does, he can pick them for himself; the yard is full of them. The other things sound all right. You don't give the canaries all of those every day, do you? I thought not. But they are things the Professor would eat if he were himself. What do mocking-birds eat, anyway?"

Britannica did not say. As you may have noticed, encyclopedias very seldom tell what one wishes to know. While Paul was looking for information and not finding it, I cut an apple and an orange in half and took them out. The Professor trilled some notes which sounded more cheerful, and began to eat his breakfast, while I went back in and hard-boiled an egg.

"Cook him a hamburger for supper,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paul advised, and with a chuckle he added, "but leave off the mustard, onion, and relish."

"He might like it raw," I thought.

That evening we had hamburger, and left the window open so the Professor could see what was going on. When he came and perched on the window-sill, we offered some to him, and it was accepted. He ate it with a speed which seemed to indicate that it was exactly what he wanted for supper.

After this we had no trouble feeding him. I saw him experimenting with the various berries which grew in the yard, sitting on a branch and eyeing them for some time before sampling the cotoneaster.

The children were delighted at his tameness, but he did not let them get very near to him. I think he was afraid they might be rough, and would, perhaps, pick him up and squeeze him. Since he was normally very fond of cats, he did not attack ours, but was careful to avoid them.

AS SOON AS he had eaten his egg that first morning, I washed out the bird-bath and filled it with clean fresh water.

The Professor, perching on a bush, watched until I had finished and had stepped back. He flew down and took a drink of water, and then he stepped cautiously in.

He turned his head and saw me watching him. At once he hoped out of the bath and stood on the edge of it, squawking and scolding.

My face began to burn hotly, but I think it was more because I was trying not to laugh, although of course it was embarrassing to think that I had been expecting to stand by and watch him take his bath. I beat a hasty retreat to the house, and from behind a curtain I watched him splashing about. He ruffled his feathers after his bath, like any old, experienced bird, and then flew out of sight.

THE PROFESSOR SOON found his voice, and we did all we could to assist him in his research by making all kinds of noises. He flew all about the neighborhood too, coming back every evening to sing what he had learned. We recognized roller-skates, bath-tubs filling and emptying with splashes in between, a baby crying, a cat-fight, airplanes overhead, and many other things, which our experience with Dark Richard helped us to understand.

One morning my neighbor three doors down had a spat with me over our children, and at the height of it I heard a bird singing from the telephone-wires overhead. Hearing what we sounded like, I began to laugh, and Mrs. Benson thought I was laughing at her, and began to scold more than ever.

"The bird," I said, "—he's mocking us. Listen!"

She listened, and that at least broke up the squabble, although I am not sure she agreed with me that he was imitating our voices.

I tried "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" one afternoon and the Professor sang it with me, but Dark Richard would not sing along with us. I tried to remember whether he had sung better than the Professor. It seemed to me that he had, but he had taken a great deal longer to learn the melody. The Professor joined in on the seventh

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

repetition, whereas it had taken Dark Richard at least five days.

Toward the end of the week, I went to a tea-party. It was a garden-party, and I was not very much surprised to see the Professor balanced on a tree near the hedge. After half an hour or so of party conversation, he began to sing like a canary.

"Oh, do listen to that dear little bird," gushed Mrs. Compton.

"Noisy thing," commented Mrs. Parks. "We had a mocker near us one time and it kept us awake night after night, making such a racket."

"Oh, their dear little song," cooed Mrs. Compton.

"Song, indeed. It imitated train-whistles and traffic signal bells and ambulance sirens and I don't know what all. My husband fired at it night after night with Bobby's BB gun, but he never managed to hit it. And whenever he went down the street, that bird would fly after him and pull hair right of his head, for nesting, I suppose. You'd think the bird knew we were after him."

"I think it is cruel to shoot birds," said Mrs. Compton, all her chins trembling. "I would never allow my boys to have a BB gun at all, or a horrid, cruel cat. I hope you don't have a cat?" she added to Ruth, our hostess. "Maybe the bird will stay and sing for you." She began to gather up crumbs and toss them toward the tree.

There followed a lively discussion about the relative merits of birds, cats and guns, and soon the ladies were talking about dogs, horses and butterflies, also. The Professor, after his one brief outburst of song, was quiet, but after another half-hour or so he began to sing again.

He sang Mrs. Compton's soft coo and Mrs. Parks's shrill harsh voice. He made a medley of Ann's lively stacatoo and Mrs. Everett's slow smooth drawl, Ruth Elton's lovely contralto and Mrs. Rhodes's great booming laugh. He sang the sweet lilt of Nancy West's voice, and the monotonous drone that was Mrs. Lindsay, and the dramatic recitative of Lucy Nicholls, who always emphasizes everything she says. I thought I would burst trying not to laugh, but I didn't want to miss a note of it.

Mrs. Parks got up impatiently and said, "It's been a lovely party, Ruth, but I must run along now. I do hope you get rid of that noisy bird. He makes conversation quite impossible."

"Singing his little heart out," murmured Mrs. Compton. "I just wish he would come home with me. Don't you hope he stays here always, Ruth?"

Ruth replied diplomatically that she liked the song of birds, but that she hoped he wouldn't imitate noises at night.

"Song, indeed," said Mrs. Parks. "I had a neighbor who had a canary and it woke me every morning at dawn—four o'clock in the summer time—shrilling away at top pitch. I could have wrung its neck."

Some of the others knew that I raised canaries and they all began to talk tactfully at once.

Lucy Nichols won.

"I'm going to a concert this evening," she said. "I do love music so. It speaks right to the heart of me. I simply couldn't live without good

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

music."

"I never could make any sense of the stuff," boomed Mrs. Rhodes. "Just a noise, that's all."

"Oh, you should take a course in music appreciation," Mrs. Nichols advised. "Music is a universal language, and so easy to understand, once a few fundamental principles are explained to you. Why, I understand every bit of music I hear!"

"Do you?" someone asked politely.

"Why, of course. And even that little untutored bird in the tree," said Mrs. Nichols, waving her hand toward the Professor. "The music speaks for itself, so clearly, so joyously—happiness! happiness! happiness! All's right with the world! Just the pure joy of living!"

She made a good exit on that, and I made my escape as well as I could, for I didn't trust myself to say anything. As I walked rapidly up the street, the Professor flew past me, cawing like a crow.

WHEN THE WEEK was ended, we mixed the drug with the food, and watched the Professor eat it. He pecked at it a few times, shuddered all over, and then stood still a moment. Off the bird then flew, and we heard the Professor calling from his bedroom window a few minutes later.

I hurried over and invited him to supper, because, of course, he had nothing prepared, and the sun was setting.

He ate with a good appetite, but he couldn't tell us anything until supper was over and the children shooed out of the way.

"It was very peculiar," he said. "I knew you, and all that, but I couldn't understand anything you said. It was like an old-fashioned phonograph running at the wrong speed. The melody you sang, which I sang with you, sounded familiar, but unbearably slow—I had to put in all kinds of trills and flourishes. A bird must live and do everything at a tremendously accelerated tempo. Probably I could not have been able to understand words in any case. A bird has no power of abstract thought—only moods and emotions—and while I was in the bird's body I seemed to partake of its nature to some extent."

"Did you like it?"

"I had a whale of a time!" said the Professor. "And flying is wonderful! wonderful!"

"You must have enjoyed mocking us all," I said. "I only hope you enjoyed it half as much as I did. But didn't you hear what the ladies were saying?" and I told him all about the tea party, which sent the men into roars of laughter.

"I did get the feeling of what was being said, then," said the Professor. "Well! I may try it again some time. Especially," he added wistfully, "the flying."

"DID YOU MAKE any recordings of his songs, Mrs. Tokkin?" I asked.

"No. It does seem rather a pity we could not."

"I suppose you did not think of it at the time."

"I don't think there was any recording equipment available then, my dear. If there had been, we certainly would have recorded Dark Richard's songs also."

I sighed.

(cont. on page 121)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ONCE UPON A UNICORN

Since his recent appearance in these pages ("The Puiss of Krrlik," April, 1972; "The Real World," December, 1972), F. M. Busby has appeared in Clarion II *and sold a science fiction novel,* Cage a Man, *to Signet Books. Now he returns with a socko vignette about Unicorns and the innocence of Hollywood virgins . . .*

F. M. BUSBY

SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD and washed up. I still can't believe it. It's a bitch, that's what; a bull bitch on wheels.

Rillo used to tell me, "Don't talk so rough. You'll ruin your God-damned image." He's washed up too; the hell with him. It wasn't all my fault.

That's right: Rillo Furillo, my husband the star. You know him, all right, with his big beautiful bod and male-chauvinist-pig smile. What you don't know is, he's playing with a 38-card deck.

You know me, too—sweet little Wendine Thorise, veteran Child Star, with the big blue eyes and long blonde hair down to keep your hands to yourself. Sweet sixteen and never been kissed. Well, there has to be some place I'd never been kissed; the tonsils maybe? Though some have tried.

Last fall we'd just wrapped up the third made-for-TV movie starring sweet little me. I was in big. I was also in bed with Arnie Karaznek, being produced just like his movies, with pauses for commercials. About when you'd expect, the phone rang. I said, "Oh, balls!" for what that was worth; he answered it anyway.

"Hello? Oh; Phil, Yeh, Yeh, go ahead. I'm not busy."

"You're sure not, you bastard, Phil who?"

"Shut up, Not you, Phil. Phil Sparger, you dumbdumb. No, not you, Phil! Dammit Wendine, shut up or I'll belt you one. Forget you heard that, Phil. OK?

"All right, Phil, what is it? . . . No. Oh God, no! In the showers? at a *Junior* High School? All right, Phil; all right. Now here's what you do . . ."

That's when I quit listening, because Arnie was always good for maybe an hour on "now here's what you do". I wiggled the rest of the way loose and went to the toity and read Cleveland Amory in *TV Guide* some more. I was pretty sure he liked my series "The Wendings of Wendine", but he's sneaky.

I was into my third reading when Arnie banged at the door. "Come on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of there, willya? You'll wear out the batteries in that vibrator." Dumb Arnie. The batteries were already dead from the last time he'd answered the phone in the middle. But I came out, anyway.

"I don't have to ask about *your* batteries, though; do I, Arnie? Already plugged back into the studio, solid. I wish to hell you'd just once . . ."

"Come on, can it, Wendine. This is serious."

"Yeh? So am I. Oh well, go ahead; who blew it this time?"

"Rillo. Only thank God he didn't, really. They just thought he would."

I didn't say anything; what was there to say about Rillo? I poured myself a short shot and lit a smoke, waiting for Arnie to get it off his mind. Maybe there was hope yet.

"I told Phil how to fix it this time, but we've got to do something permanent about Rillo's problem. I think I've got it figured. I can count on you, now, can't I, Wendine?"

I didn't like it already but I had to ask. "Such as for what?"

"It's the romance of the century!"

"What is?" I knew all right but I had to hear it to believe it.

"You and Rillo. What did you think?"

I threw the shot glass but Arnie ducks better than I throw. All I broke was one of his dumb ceramics over the fireplace. It was better than nothing.

"I am not marrying any Goddamned queer!"

"Look, chickie; Rillo isn't queer. He's just curious, is all."

"*Damn* curious. The answer is still go shove it, Arnie."

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL wedding in all the magazines. I cannot convey, I really can't, the depth of my girlish emotions when Rillo and I were at last alone with our great love, I said for publication. There we were, all right, he with his great bod, his manly smile, his limpid eyes and passionate voice. I was there too, sort of.

We really were a top news sensation; for three straight months I didn't see Jackie on a magazine cover. The climax, if you'll pardon the expression, came when Rillo and I made our movie together—a real live honest not-for-TV movie, with no commercials.

We made it damn fast, as a matter of fact, because I was expecting what they still call a blessed event in spite of population pollution. It had to be Arnie; the timing was wrong for that cute cameraman. Probably the week Arnie's phone was out of order. So in a way it was lucky Rillo and I got married when we did.

It's too bad that the movie is down the flush now. It was a horn of corn but kind of cute, a fantasy fairy-tale thing. Semi-adult Disney. Actually is was all Arnie's boss's idea, including keeping the whole production under wraps until he could spring the story on TV for crash effect.

Arnie Karaznek's boss goes by his initials, only, ever since he read a Harold Robbins book. The initials sound a little suggestive but he doesn't seem to mind. Would you believe Franklin Ulysses? Anyway, old F.U. ran into a scientific thing in the papers, and halfway understood it for once.

I'm not stupid, you know; just dumb. I catch a lot that goes on; sometimes I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't use it right, is all. I'll bet I understood as much as Arnie's boss did, about some zoo groups were breeding present-type animals back to earlier forms that went extinct. Like you could take a cage of lizards and go for dinosaurs. Well, maybe not quite that—but West Berlin does have a corral full of Stone Age supercows: Aurochs, they call them.

Arnie's boss read where somebody in Africa had bred back to unicorns. You've heard of unicorns; there weren't any, really—not one-horned horses, anyway. There isn't any such thing as a one-horned animal: rhinoceroses have a mustache with a permanent hard-on and narwhals are freak porpoises with one long tooth each. I remember that from high school before I dropped out, to put the best face on that change in my life-style. But it seems there used to be an antelope with its horns twisted together so tight in front that it looked like one horn. And this African outfit had bred antelopes back to that model.

Arnie's boss wanted to cash in, some way. The movie was called "The Lure of the Unicorn." Old F.U. paid a real bundle to get us an antelope in a hurry.

Too bad it won't go, now. The antelope was dumb and had a face like a camel's understudy, but it was *nice*-dumb, even it if didn't learn tricks too well. Gee, when I saw on the screen, the shot where it came and laid its head in my lap, I forgot about the lump of sugar it was really after, and cried all over hell. For a minute there, I almost thought that unicorn was right.

We got all the film in the can before I began to show much. Rillo and I did a good job, we thought; so did Arnie and even Franklin Ulysses. I figured we had it all on ice. Then F.U. got another one of his great ideas.

"A TV show, a Special, *live*! That's how we'll flack this flick," he said. "How can it miss?" By this time I was getting a little big in the gut, but everyone said it wouldn't matter.

"The added touch of your pregnancy will make the situation all that much more piquant," Arnie said at a P.R. meeting. Arnie has a lot of tact, around P.R. people. Without them he'd have said "Just do like I say, you dumb broad!" I wish to hell the kid were going to be the cameraman's.

At first reading the TV script didn't look too bad. After the taped lead-in somebody would lay the unicorn legend onto Mr. Nielsen's sheep, heavy on the whipped-cream. Rillo was supposed to do that bit but he was having a little problem with uppers and downers—nothing really serious. So Milan Banfield, the second lead, had to take it.

Then Rillo and I would do the part of our big scene where the unicorn did its trick. All I had to do was sit still and mug right, and all Rillo had to do was sit alongside me and not twitch too much while we spoke our lines. No big problem.

One thing bothered me."Look, Arnie," I said one time, "Everybody knows I'm married; right? And some of the magazines are spilling it that I'm knocked-up, now. So we do this thing. What kind of klutz is going to believe that this freak antelope knows what the hell it's doing?'

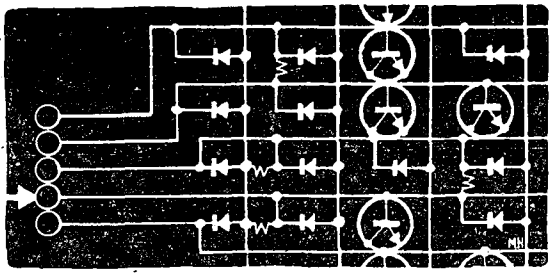
"The kind of klutz that watches this kind of TV show and buys tickets for

(cont. on page 130)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

SF in Dimension



THE SEARCH FOR MYSTERY
(1958-1967)

CYRIL KORNBLUTH WAS RIGHT in suggesting in 1957 in a speech delivered at the University of Chicago that the true stuff of sf is not social criticism or anything else objective. The true stuff of sf, as he said then, is "unconscious symbolic material more concerned with the individual's relationship to his family and the raw universe than with the individual's relationship to society."

This is not to say that Kornbluth and his mentor, Damon Knight, were immediately understood or generally believed. Kornbluth's reading of the symbolic understructure of sf was neither systematic nor complete. He was able to translate only enough of this hidden and difficult language to demonstrate that it does exist. And he did not indicate what the utility of this symbolic expression might be and at least once left the impression that the point might be release of an individual writer's neurosis. This, for some, gave Kornbluth's talk more of the flavor of reductionism than of the daring exploration into an unknown country that it was.

Only fourteen months after his University of Chicago lecture, Cyril Kornbluth died at the age of 34. He had not made further explorations and had not yet applied his insight to his own fiction. In that same year, 1958, sf, following the traditional vision that Kornbluth had denied, wandered off an unseen cliff and took another fall. This one can only be compared with the great tumble suffered by sf in the late Thirties, but was more serious.

This new crisis may be seen as the inevitable heavy cost of those years in which sf had believed itself to be a completely conscious art and abandoned the unconscious. Everything in sf was known. Everything was cut and dried. Everything was dull. In 1960, as we watched the sf magazines disappear from the newstands, or as we read those that were left with increasingly less enjoyment, it seemed that all life had departed from science fiction.

The Hugo-award winning novel for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the year 1960 was Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. This, the best book of its times, was not actually original in 1960. It was based on three stories first published in *F&SF* in 1955-57. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a well-written, highly realistic, overwhelmingly ironic, and deservedly successful novel of the fluctuations in fortune of the members of a small Catholic Order devoted to the preservation of knowledge, in the American Southwest after an atomic war. Over a period of 1800 years, humanity raises itself high enough to manage another atomic war, but members of the Order escape to carry Catholicism to the stars. It is all highly plausible. Transcendence is only barely present. This was the best novel of the year, but it only hints at the mysteries that animate sf.

The Hugo-winning short fiction that year was Poul Anderson's "The Longest Voyage" (*Analog*, December 1960). This was a highly realistic account of the first circumnavigation of a large inhabited moon of a planet in another solar system by a close copy of Sir Francis Drake. This captain discovers a distressed spaceman, but instead of helping to repair the spaceman's ship and reunite this forgotten world with the stellar nations, the captain destroys the spaceship and continues on his voyage. There is a proper order to things and he believes that men must perform their heroic deeds in natural order. Everything here is plausible. The Sir Francis Drake is a most plausible copy—he sails the *Golden Leaper* and serves his Queen. The unusual solar system has been calculated and diagramed. The only transcendence is the space travel that brought the local humans to their world and that threatens to take them away again before they are ready.

1960 was also the year that John Campbell thought that it would be appropriate to change the name of his magazine from *Astounding Science Fiction* to *Analog Science Fact and Fiction*. And the Hugo award for best magazine went to *Analog*. There was no greater liveliness elsewhere.

And 1960 was the year that the Hugo for best fan publication went to Earl Kemp for his symposium, "Who Killed Science Fiction?"

However, if we look at the situation of science fiction at the end of the Fifties in a larger context—that of the development of modern speculative fantasy from Mary Shelley to the present—sf does not seem quite so critically ill. The crisis seems more like a momentary hesitation at the end of a natural stage while the key to the next stage is discovered, and less like a deathbed.

Four elements are necessary to fully mature, fully effective speculative fantasy. In any story, there must be a balance between sense and meaning. Sense is what is told in a fiction. It is the argument, the visible intellectual surface structure. Without sense, without this structure, stories fall into emotional fragments. They become aesthetic escapism, as intensely meaningful but senseless as a dream.

Meaning in a story is the central emotional movement, that which is shown rather than told, that which is acted out. Without meaning, stories diminish into didactic escapism. They become as rigorously sensible, but meaningless an exercise, as the invention of crossword puzzles.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emotion is more important than intellect in fiction. Meaning is the primary business of art, just as sense is the primary business of philosophy. However, although meaning is more important than sense in art, in fiction, and in speculative fantasy, both sense and meaning are necessary to all three, if they are to be fully effective.

If sense and meaning are the first two necessary elements of speculative fantasy, the second two are plausibility and mystery. Plausibility is conformity to the body of the most certain and exact knowledge possessed by mankind. Mystery is the unknown and the unknowable, Aristotle's "element of the wonderful" which he said was required in tragedy.

A minimum standard of plausibility applies to all symbols in a speculative fantasy. These symbols do not have to prove themselves plausible. They must take care only to not be found implausible. They may be different from anything that exists, so long as they do not violate certain knowledge. As Heinlein pointed out as long ago as 1947, sf stories may violate theory but not fact. To this extent, Gernsback, Campbell and Heinlein were right in their calls for science, prediction and realism. Plausibility is a necessary element in speculative fantasy, but not the only element nor the most important.

It was precisely on the question of plausibility that the old formulation of the World Beyond the Hill failed. When magical powers, magical creatures and magical places began to seem unnatural and to violate the certain knowledge of explorers, zoologists, and other practical men, the old speculative fantasy fell into disrepute. Sf did not die of implausibility, but it did lose its place as a fully mature literature. With the connections cut between sf and objective reality, speculative fantasy was no longer able to express the highest admirations possible within the culture. The problem of subjective fiction in the nineteenth century was to relabel its central symbols and to find the arguments to give transcendence plausibility again.

Sf is defined by mystery. Mystery is the fountainhead of transcendence. Every speculative fantasy has a central symbol that is transcendent—the stuff of mystery—as well as being plausible.

The power of speculative fantasy to compel derives from the fact that both plausibility and mystery claim to be infinite. Plausibility says that there is nothing in the universe, including the universe, that cannot be known. Mystery says that there is nothing in the universe, including the universe, that can be totally known. Obviously, both cannot be true, in fiction or in life. This ambiguity is the fundamental motive for the actions of humanity, but short of the Omega Point when consciousness coincides with the universe, there is no way to prove or to disprove either claim. Both must be respected. All that we know now is that both plausibility and mystery are large.

If speculative fantasy is to exist—and to illuminate the ambiguity that is life—neither claim to infinitude can be presented as absolutely certain. A balance must be struck in speculative fantasy between one claim and the other.

In speculative fantasy's worst moment at the beginning of the nineteenth century, plausibility was the problem of the literature. The tradi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tional symbols of sf were no longer plausible. Mystery was a basic assumption of sf, and if plausibility were left out of consideration, sf could list mysteries to the end of time. From Mary Shelley in 1816 to Hugo Gernsback in 1926, the primary development of speculative fantasy was in establishing the plausibility—rather, the lack of implausibility—in the reformulated transcendent symbols it offered.

Mary Shelley, Poe and Verne and the rest of the writers of the nineteenth century firmly established power as science-beyond-science rather than magic. Both plausibility and mystery could accept the formulation that transcendent power was like science, subject to science, but not yet science. Power is immaterial, innately mysterious, and it can pretend to inhabit anything. It can pass as the unknown qualities of known things. It can pretend to be galvanism and raise the dead. It can pretend to be hypnotism and carry men off to the future.

Aliens and realms are not so mutable as power. They cannot pretend to be science, but only to be potentially subject to it. After 1890, it was discovered by Wells and others that aliens and realms could be deemed plausible by association with power passing as science-beyond-science if they acknowledged themselves to be like known things subject to scientific investigation. They must acknowledge themselves to be natural phenomena.

So we have an A. Merritt character speaking of the alien creature, the Dweller in the Moon Pool:

" 'Larry,' I replied, somewhat severely, 'you may not know that I have a scientific reputation which, putting aside all modesty, I may say is an enviable one. You used a word last night to which I must interpose serious objection. You more than hinted that I had—superstitions. Let me inform you, Larry O'Keefe, that I am solely a seeker, observer, analyst and synthesist of facts. I am not'—and I tried to make my tone as pointed as my words—'I am not a believer in phantoms or spooks, leprechawns, banshees, or ghostly harpers . . . And don't think I have any idea that the phenomenon is supernatural in the sense spiritualists and table turners have given that word. I do think it is supernormal; energized by a force unknown to modern science—but that doesn't mean I think it outside the radius of science.' "

H. P. Lovecraft, the foremost writer for *Weird Tales* during the Twenties and Thirties, and a near contemporary of Merritt, labored to describe his horrifying aliens and loathsome realms as natural phenomena. Lin Carter says, "In the twentieth century it is science—not superstition—that gives birth to genuine horrors [read 'plausible transcendence']. Building on this notion, Lovecraft concocted his stories on a scientific basis. His horrible demon gods are not spooks but completely unhuman sentient beings from distant worlds, galaxies, dimensions or other planes of being. Millions of years ago they came down from the stars to dominate the steaming fens and fern-forests of remote geological eras; they were driven from this earth, imprisoned on far worlds, but still their evil influence lingers in certain repellent myths of frightful antiquity, and they are yet venerated by loathsome rites practiced by certain elder cults in remote backwaters of our planet. And the modern age is haunted by the fear that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they may awaken from the deathless sleep wherein they are imprisoned, break their fetters, and . . . return!

"To further seduce his readers into a momentary suspension of disbelief, Lovecraft buttressed his fictional creations by surrounding them with an elaborate machinery of invented sources—learned anthropological allusions, data drawn from the literature of archaeology, spurious quotations from rare texts of ancient lore. To baffle and intrigue, he cleverly mingled fact with fiction, scholarship with invention; references to the mysterious Ponape ruins, to the enigmatic stone colossi of Easter Island, and jungle-grown remnants of antique Mayan civilizations appear cheek by jowl with whispered hints of 'cyclopean and many-columned Y'ha-nthlei,' 'sunken R'lyeh in the Pacific,' and 'fabulous Irem, City of Pillars, in Arabia Deserta.' "

Lovecraft's intention, of course, was by no means to baffle and intrigue. He mingled fact with his fiction for the same reason that modern writers of sf bandy large numbers, mouth what sounds like science, present analogies, cite sources, fake sources, present pronunciation guides, quote liberally from imaginary encyclopedias, include footnotes, and append appendices. Lovecraft wished to establish his imagined references as of the same kind as true scholarship. He aimed to make his realms and aliens seem one with the strange but actual.

Since 1926, the not-implausibility of transcendent symbols has been generally accepted. The focus of attention has shifted to the invention of a plausible and sensible ground for transcendence to function against. In the early Gernsback days, the one background for transcendence that was both plausible and sensible was our own familiar contemporary world. The future and outer space were voids with no natural plausibility or sense. The *Skylark*, Doc Smith's pioneering ship, found evidence of transcendence in space: a strange primitive planet, a single isolated alien, and a lost race not unlike other lost races. But plausibility and sense, like villainy, had to be imported from Earth.

In 1928, Smith could not have written a story in which Earth was not mentioned—a story set, shall we say, on a random planet five thousand years from now with a highly developed human culture. The arguments tying these assumptions to familiar knowledge had not been made. Smith would have to have contacted this place and people from a secure base in 1928.

From the founding of AMAZING through 1957, the arguments were made. This was an appallingly difficult enterprise, demanding great intelligence from many men. Starting from nothing, populate the void. Over a period of thirty years, in many thousands of stories, the void was populated plausibly and sensibly. The significance of what was occurring was never apparent, but time and space were brilliantly and efficiently associated in length and breadth, in effects, in population, in every possibility, with sense and plausibility.

Step by step: Starting in the present with basement workshops, imaginary inventors built many strange devices, including machines to travel in time and space. In these machines, intrepid explorers scouted, mapped and circumnavigated large portions of space and time and proved they could always go

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

further to find difference-from-here if they had to. Behind the explorers came all conditions of men—patrolmen, miners, pirates and muck-farmers—pioneering the new lands and proving that men could live in them. Behind them came the bureaucrats and the empire-builders. Space was structured into political units of every size, from Earth, to Terra and her colonies, to galactic empire. Time was structured into epochs in which things could change and change again. The void was filled consistently, vividly and plausibly with transportation, communication, government, economics and sociology. The arguments were made over and over. The best ones were rehearsed until they became accepted justifications. The worst ones were improved or discarded. So many arguments were made that it became clear that any situation could be plausibly justified in a variety of ways. By 1957, what would once have been too wild and unsupported to make a novel by Doc Smith was the common stuff of pedestrian short stories.

All this brilliant and efficient mental universe-filling was performed as though it were an end in itself. It followed the flag of Gernsback. It was an unconscious impulse. It was a necessary inevitability sweeping through the voids of space and time, a wave awash. No one knew why it was being done. It was simply where the action was.

At the same time that writers were inventing and decorating their new worlds, they were discovering how to write in new ways. Style evolved. Technique evolved. Writers taught themselves and learned from each other. If to Robert H. Davis at *Argosy* in 1922, *The Skylark of Space* was too wild for his readers to accept, what would he have made of the assumptions and craft of a good but not unique modern short story? "Four in One" by Damon Knight (*Galaxy*, February 1953), or "Fondly Farenheit" by Alfred Bester (*F&SF*, August 1954), or even "Exploration Team" by Leinster (*Astounding*, March 1956) or "Margin of Profit" by Anderson (*Astounding*, September 1956).

What is particularly impressive is the impact that speculative fantasy had in the years from Gernsback to the end of the Fifties. During these years, it was the only expanding form of fiction in the Western world. This was not sf in its full effective maturity. Speculative fantasy in its full effective maturity is not primarily a vehicle for its own self-justifications. This was a crude awkward sort of fiction, pre-occupied with technical matters. And even so, early speculative fantasy like that of Burroughs, Merritt and Doc Smith still has meaning today. Large numbers of the 25,000 stories published as sf have been reprinted, in spite of their crudity and awkwardness.

Once sf was launched into the business of establishing plausibility and sense—the common agreement of differing plausibilities—it was not to be stopped until it had carried the business out to its extreme. There had to be a moment like the late Fifties when plausibility and sense reached a limit, when writers vied to find the minimally implausible transcendent symbol, when in lieu of meaning sf was dominated by sex, sensationalism and mimetic targets like Senator Joseph McCarthy. There had to be a moment when the new universes of the World Beyond the Hill

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were publicly demonstrated to be plausible and sensible from top to bottom and side to side—except for the last lying trace of transcendent power masquerading as an inflation of science. The moment of maximum plausibility.

This was a necessary and inevitable moment. Until it was reached, sf could not become mature. Once it was reached, sf was nearly ready to become mature. Sense and plausibility—these most vulnerable portions of a subjective literature—were now well-established. They had only to be balanced with meaning and mystery.

At this important moment, something like objectivity seemed the master of sf. At that same moment, however, this pseudo-objectivity was challenged, first by writers like Knight and Kornbluth who suggested that the real stuff of science fiction was subjectivity, then by Sputnik, which by its patently superior objective reality demonstrated the limitations of the claims of Gernsback and his heirs. These challenges were the signal that the time had come for sf to seek mystery again.

Most amazingly, sf was not alone at this important moment. This critical point when sf turned to look for mystery was the same moment that the culture as a whole turned to look for mystery. Once again, sf was clearly involved in another cycle—but this one far larger and more important than the fluctuations in fashion in the popular arts we have pointed to before and will point to again in discussing the Sixties. The Fifties, the solid Eisenhower years, were the moment when the cult of objectivity had its maximum influence in every aspect of our culture, just as in science fiction. But at precisely the time when sf turned to find mystery again in order to express its subjective truths, one thinker after another across the range of society and learning pointed out that in spite of the great advances produced by objective study during these past hundreds of years in the West, the fruits of objectivity are becoming increasingly trivial. Moreover, objective study is not equally applicable to all inquiry. Sometimes, as Heisenberg demonstrated, it is not possible at all. In fact, overconcentration on the objective to the exclusion of the subjective has been costly to the world and society in ways that have never been publicly acknowledged.

This was not entirely news. It had been said here and said there before in many places by many men over the last several centuries, but it had never been said by so many and so specifically as now in the late fifties. Random shots had been fired against the objectivity that demolished the tottering old medieval subjectivity but never replaced it, but these were the first heavy broadsides. Between 1957 and 1959, a large number of important books, some of them written over a period of many years and therefore independently generated, were published, challenging objectivity, ignoring objectivity, seeking alternatives to objectivity, or looking for the roots of objectivity. Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) is part of this cycle as much as Alan Watts' *The Way of Zen* (1957). We may point to Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* (1958), as well as Claude Levi-Strauss's collection of papers, *Structural Anthropology* (1958). Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* (1959) is relevant. And so are Arthur Koestler's *The Sleepwalkers* (1959), *The Masks of God:*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Primitive Mythology (1959), the first volume of Joseph Campbell's monumental study of myth, and Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* (first US publication 1959, but completed in 1938! and first published in France in 1955). It is no accident that the Beat Generation came to public attention at this time, too, with the word Beatnik being formed by analogy with the word Sputnik. The Beats and their successors are all part of this same process which has continued and accelerated. The seminal books of the late Fifties have been followed by many many more. We might mention as examples, Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* (1960), Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Abraham Maslow's *The Psychology of Science* (1966), R.D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience* (1967), Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Civilization* (1967), Carlos Castenada's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968), and Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969). One of the chapters in Roszak's book is even entitled "The Myth of Objective Consciousness".

And, of course, while books anticipated and reinforced the ferment of the Sixties, the challenge to objectivity has in recent years become a culture-wide phenomenon. The discontents, movements and psychic explorations of these past dozen years have been a first attempt, undertaken by many, to establish a new subjectivity to balance the objectivity that has helped bring us to ecological, political, social, economic, psychological and moral crisis.

One of the first widely published accounts of a mental exploration, a giant step taken beyond objectivity, was Aldous Huxley's pamphlet, *The Doors of Perception* (1954). This report of a trip taken on mescaline concludes with an image remarkably like the image of the World Beyond the Hill by which we have described subjective fiction:

"But the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser and less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend."

Mystery. Unfathomable mystery. That was what the literature of subjectivity needed to find at the end of the Fifties. But where to find it in the uniformly plausible and sensible universe of the new sf? All throughout the spread of plausibility, mystery had stayed tantilizingly out of reach. It had always been found beyond, or at the edges of things—in all the places that plausibility had not yet reached. Plausibility had been led on and on until at last it permeated the sf universe. So where was mystery now to be found?

Where was mystery?

Mystery was everywhere. Mystery was anywhere. The key perception was contained in Fredric Brown's 1948 novel, *What Mad Universe*, where it is asserted: "If there are infinite universes, then all possible combinations must exist. Then, somewhere, *everything must be true*."

Everything must be true somewhere in the infinite imaginary universes of sf. That is, there is no mystery that cannot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be plausibly maintained within an sf story. This new world of the imagination has plausible mystery as its very ground of being. Mystery can appear anywhere at any time.

What has been created—or rather, recreated—by Mary Shelley, Poe, Verne, Wells, Burroughs, Merritt, Gernsback, Smith, Campbell, Heinlein and all the rest is the true World Beyond the Hill. Like the old World Beyond the Hill of this Earth it is everywhere plausible and at the same time everywhere mysterious.

But in the late Fifties, this was not clearly true. It had to be perceived and demonstrated. The main development of speculative fantasy from 1958 through 1967 was the successful rediscovery of mystery.

It was no easy business for writers trained to regard plausibility as an absolute virtue to actively present mystery. Even in the Sixties and to the present day, much sf has continued to be cut to the same conservative old shapes, to make the same ritual explanations, and to forswear mystery in favor of plausibility. It is not completely misplaced for some sf to emphasize plausibility. At least a few people can well be concerned with changes in knowledge and make it their business to keep the plausible justifications renewed. There is a useful place for writers like Larry Niven who acknowledge *Scientific American* and other science journals as their chief source of inspiration. Largely, however, writing in the old style to the old requirements is neither necessary nor desirable. What results is most usually tired stuff.

What must be realized is that once plausibility has been established as a universal quality, it is no longer necessary to keep asserting it. If the ordinary man today already finds faster-than-light travel plausible, it is not necessary to prove it to him anew in each new story.

Writing in 1957 as William Atheling, Jr., James Blish described his own practice: "Blish has borrowed to good effect a trick of Lester del Rey, who never describes a faster-than-light space drive—or a similar standard prop—without working out, for each new story, a new rationale for it, thus making the gimmick his own rather than (as is usually the case with lesser writers) a magical device for *avoiding* thought." But this is the attitude of a writer still working under the assumption that plausibility must be established at all cost. That it is outworn is evident in the very phrase "standard prop". The invention of faster-than-light drives is no longer the central business of sf. It has been done again and again and again. There is no need to do one more time what has already been done quite satisfactorily. Modern sf has its own work to do. Blish effectively admits as much in his very next paragraph. He describes his own story, which he is criticizing, as "stronger on ingenuity than on strictly fictional values."

The war is won. Ingenuity has done its job. Without a special story problem, there is no need to invent a special device. Certainly not for its own sake. Plausibility is now so well-established that a television program like *Star Trek* can appeal to a general audience that lacks any background in the step-by-step development of modern science fiction and feel no need to justify its devices. Fully plausible

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

speculative fantasy is a given of our culture.

The immediate problem of sf in the late Fifties and early Sixties was how to compromise plausibility so as to achieve the necessary balance with mystery. Not every writer could do this. Those that could manage the trick could only do it under special circumstances. Still, it was a first step.

One way was to assume that in limited areas of space or time the laws of the universe might be looser than those we know, or might even be altogether different. This is the premise of Jack Vance's "The Men Return" (*Infinity,* July 1957). After *The Dying Earth* in 1950, Vance had confined himself to realistic speculative fantasy, but hear him now in this story in which mystery returns. Listen to the commentary on objectivity. Think of the work of R.D. Laing with the rich subjective realities of schizophrenics:

"The Relict retained a few tattered recollections of the old days, before system and logic had been rendered obsolete. Man had dominated Earth by virtue of a single assumption: that an effect could be traced to a cause, itself the effect of a previous cause.

"Manipulation of this basic law yielded rich results; there seemed no need for any other tool or instrumentality. Man congratulated himself on his generalized structure. He could live on desert, on plain or ice, in forest or in city; Nature had not shaped him to a special environment.

"He was unaware of his vulnerability. Logic was the special environment; the brain was the special tool.

"Then came the terrible hour when Earth swam into a pocket of noncausality, and all the ordered tensions of cause-effect dissolved. The special tool was useless; it had no purchase on reality. From the two billions of men, only a few survived—the mad. They were now the Organisms, lords of the era, their discords so exactly equivalent to the vagaries of the land as to constitute a peculiar wild wisdom."

The assumption of this story is a narrow one. The fiction that results is necessarily special and limited. A second broader possibility was to assume that humans faced with the unfamiliar might not be able to immediately reduce it to the totally plausible with a quick bit of remembered twentieth century knowledge. Not everyone is a scientist-engineer-fount-of-all-knowledge. Everyone has his areas of ignorance. Computer science seems to suggest that any mentality may be able to understand only those systems simpler than itself. Characters within a story, then, might legitimately be baffled by highly evolved beings or advanced technology.

As long as the reader is assured that plausibility and sense are ubiquitous in the sf universe and that explanation of any phenomenon is possible, it is not necessary that characters understand everything they encounter. In the late Fifties, then, occasional stories like Pohl and Kornbluth's *Wolfbane* (*Galaxy,* October-November 1957; expanded book version 1959), Fritz Leiber's *The Big Time* (1957), and Robert Heinlein's *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* (1958) began to appear in which mystery is introduced and accepted rather than explained away. The mystery was likely to be minor. Characters were likely to be simple or ignorant. The pace of events was likely to press heavily so that no time was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

available for the luxury of investigation. But, centrally important, mystery was back.

These first partial solutions to the problem of the reintroduction of mystery—that is, limited alteration of the rules of the universe and limitation in the understanding of characters—were immediately compatible with the standard science fiction of the Fifties. There was a third partial solution, even broader and more indicative of possibility, that followed these first two after several years. It was not thought of immediately because it meant a return to a style of story that had been out of vogue for fully ten years—the highly aesthetic, highly imaginative story of the far future in the style of *The Dying Earth*.

The premise of this solution is that given enough time evolution might produce any desired mystery. Given enough time, even Earth might become a transcendent realm. That is not an implausible premise. And stories that dwell more on the results of change than on the mechanics of change may be quite satisfyingly mysterious.

The first writer to make an essay in this direction, not surprisingly, was Jack Vance, the author of *The Dying Earth* and of "The Men Return", a man who values mystery. His first new story of an imaginative and aesthetic far future, "The Miracle-Workers" (*Astounding*, July 1958)—again, listen to the title—after a magical and mysterious exposition concludes with the re-establishment of our present-day knowledge, ironically given the name of magic. We, the ancients, are the miracle workers of the title. To the characters of the story, our science is magic which they propose to bring under rational scrutiny. The story quite clearly says that one man's science is another man's magic. And in Vance's second new story in this vein, the Hugo-winning *The Dragon Masters* (*Galaxy*, August 1962), evolved science is allowed to be quite magical, and plausibility and explanation are less strongly accentuated.

Besides Vance, Brian Aldiss, a British writer with a well-developed Wellsian sense of devolution, deserves mention. Along with more conventional material, like the ironic "Poor Little Warrior!" (*F&SF*, April 1958), in which a dinosaur-hunting time traveler is eaten alive by a "giggling" brontosaurus louse, Aldiss produced a number of imaginative stories of the mysteries of the far future or far places—the novel *Starship* (1959), "Old Hundredth" (*New Worlds*, November 1960), and the Hugo-winning series of short stories, "Hothouse" (*F&SF*, February 1961) and sequels (revised as the novel, *The Long Afternoon of Earth*).

However, while mystery was beginning to be reintroduced in these years from 1958 through 1963, and was honored when it could be found, it was not common or typical. The more common product of science fiction was retread material. It was the series of novels of psionics in the near-future by Randall Garrett and Laurence Janifer writing under the name of Mark Phillips that were published in *Astounding-Analog*. Or it was H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking* (*Analog*, November 1962-February 1963), a transcription of a historical incident far more literal than Poul Anderson's carbon of Sir Francis Drake. Science fiction was staler in these years than at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any time in its history. Even those authors who did manage to evoke mystery were not able to do so with regularity, but only in occasional stories.

There were two major exceptions. In these doldrum days of the late Fifties and early Sixties, two unusual writers, Philip K. Dick and Cordwainer Smith, were able to freely and effectively invoke mystery in their stories. Both men seemed to see the world in terms of a more-or-less plausible outerness that obscured a truly mysterious and essential innerness. Both were convinced that mystery is as basic to this strange universe we inhabit as plausibility, that mystery is in all probability the truer stuff. The sources of this faith, however, were quite different. "Smith"—a Sinologist named Paul M.A. Linebarger who died of a heart attack in 1966—was a committed Christian with a mystical bent. Dick, on the other hand, writes out of an equally strong psychic uncertainty.

Except for their one basic commonality, their faith in mystery, these two eccentrics have no more similarity to one another than they have to anyone else. Throughout the history of modern sf, there have always been rare writers who have stood outside the context of their times and written their own private visions. Wayward individualists. Eccentrics. John Campbell in his Don A. Stuart guise was an eccentric who imposed his personal vision on the entire field of science fiction. H.P. Lovecraft, a writer whose essential qualities have never been successfully imitated, is another of these eccentrics. Olaf Stapledon is yet another. Many, like Ray Bradbury, Avram Davidson, J.G. Ballard and R.A. Lafferty, have primarily been short story writers in this literature that has generally been most effective at longer lengths. Some, like Bradbury, have been clearly important but have also stood outside of all the main lines of development of sf. Some, like Lafferty, have been so much their own men that their virtues have yet to be assimilated into the general pool of materials, techniques and styles available to the writers of the field. All have been the followed rather than followers. Only infrequently have they had wide general audiences. More commonly, they are the subject of strongly loyal but narrow cults of readers.

It may be that when speculative fantasy is fully functional as a mature literature, all its master writers will be to some degree describable as eccentrics. When sf was in the process of development, writers could build their careers on their engineering skills. Now that the engineering is completed, something quite different may be called for—highly developed personal vision. Eccentricity.

Of the two eccentrics under present consideration, Philip Dick has been the more generally popular, although he is easily the less polished writer. He did not begin as an eccentric. This may simply mean that unlike Stapledon, Edgar Pangborn, R.A. Lafferty and Cordwainer Smith he did not come to science fiction as a mature man. During the Fifties, his novels, though strange, were cut to conventional measure. They looked like the work that every other writer was doing. They were the usual product of one more guild master.

Dick was interested even then in questions about the nature of reality, but since the questions were subor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dinated to the iron rigidities of conventional plots, they generally remained unanswered. The best of his early books, *Eye in the Sky* (1957), is, for instance, a trip through a series of worlds which prove to be illusions when tested. The novel ends in what looks like our own conventional world with a responsible attack on the security clearance system and other social ills. But this standard brouhaha hides the fact that the reality of this last world is never tested. Is it one more illusion? This is a central question for Dick, but the standard cut of his plot will not allow him to pursue it.

Is the plausibility of our world one more illusion? Dick obviously believes that it is. And after a hiatus around the turn of the Sixties, he returned as a mature eccentric and began to say as much in one book after another. Dick is a writer with great and obvious weaknesses. His style is colorless. His characters are characterless. His worlds are cardboard. His tone does not change from one story to the next. His stories can all begin to seem much of a muchness. But for the reader who is willing to follow where Dick leads without looking to left or right, his vision can be intense and terrifying.

The first of the novels in which Dick began to come to grips with his central theme was the Hugo-winning *The Man in the High Castle* (1962). This book was written, so it is said, under the direction of the *I Ching*. *The Man in the High Castle* is the story of a world in which the United States lost World War II. In this alternate reality, a novelist has written a story which has shaken the composure of the occupiers of the land, a story of an alternate universe in which the United States, not the Axis Powers, won the war. Dick's imaginary novelist wrote this novel, *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, under the direction of the *I Ching*. And when the *I Ching* is asked, it indicates that the world of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* is true reality.

However, this true reality in which the United States won World War II is not our world. It is significantly different. What is reality?

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch (1964) is Dick's most powerful and frightening book. It offers no safety to its characters and no safety to its readers. A hallucinogenic drug which takes the user anywhere and allows him to be anything for an indefinite period of time is introduced into a depressing future world. However, the user of this drug never emerges from its grip, though time and time again he may think he has. An illusion flowers and is over. Stability? Reality? So it would seem. But then cracks appear in seeming stability, and spread, and reality is no longer reality. Once again we find ourselves in another blossoming illusion.

The drug comes to control the entire world of the book—including the minds and lives of those characters who have never taken it. Nightmarish mystery is everywhere. All the characters can do is dig their nails in, hold on as tight as they can, and say cheerily, "See? Stable." And this unhappy state of radical uncertainty—very like our own—is the one true reality that Dick will admit. Apparent plausibilities don't fool him.

Linebarger—"Cordwainer Smith"—was a more special and private writer. Dick's uncertainties are the uncertainties of our time. His answers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may not be answers we like, but they are answers that many readers recognize and respond to. Smith's assurances, on the other hand, while intensely meaningful to some have not been intended for or accepted by a wide general readership. Smith was an elitist—as his stories clearly indicate—and he himself said, "I'd much rather be appreciated by a select few than enjoyed by the bawling millions." Ironically, since sf has been a popular literature, this has meant that his elitism, his specialness, and his intense privateness, have kept him largely confined to peripheral popular markets. It has been the loyalty and determination of a few sensitive editors—Damon Knight, Frederik Pohl, Cele Goldsmith Lalli and Don Bensen—that has been responsible for our seeing his work in print. The days of Smith's greatest reputation are yet to come.

Smith was a true eccentric in our sense. Although it is known that he published one sf story, "War No. 81-Q", under the name of Anthony Bearden as early as 1928, it seems typical of the man that so far no one has been able to say just where this story was published. The first story that Linebarger published under the name Cordwainer Smith, "Scanners Live in Vain," appeared in 1950 in a magazine called *Fantasy Book*, a non-paying market, after having been rejected widely. This story has accumulated enough respect among sf writers in the years since that it was included in the first volume of *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame*, the historical anthology selected by the Science Fiction Writers of America. The second Cordwainer Smith story, "The Game of Rat and Dragon", appeared in *Galaxy* in 1955, but it was only from 1959 until his death that he was published with regularity. As though to emphasize his private specialness, Smith kept his contacts with the science fiction community minimal, and it was only after his death that his identity was publicly acknowledged.

Smith's stories are elitist, cold, grotesque and elliptical. They are not easy to read and not easy to like. They are apparently heavily influenced by Smith's steeping in Chinese culture, and they can seem quite simply *wrong* to a Western eye and ear. And yet, for those who can read them, there is deep appeal. In part, that appeal is Smith's universe, a strange future fifteen thousand years from now, presented as though it were part history, part legend. It is only by comparison of all of Smith's stories with their many cross-references that even a partial picture of this future can be built up in the reader's mind. And in part, the appeal is the essential mysteriousness of Smith's consistent universe. It is a place that can never be completely known.

This mysteriousness is not the result of Smith's premature death alone. It is not just the result of a half-completed canvas. It is a deliberately cultivated quality. It is the stuff of his characters and the strange obliqueness of their thought. It is Smith's devices. It is Smith's style. All mysterious.

As Smith said in introducing his first collection—a paperback issued by a now-defunct line of books in Evanston, Illinois—"Every day, any day, in the human mind transcends all the wonders of science. It doesn't matter who people are, when they lived, or what they are doing—the important thing is the ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plosion of wonder which goes on and on and is stopped only by death. Everyone is a Lear, an Othello, a Desdemona, a Prospero, a Caliban—more wonderful than a Moon rocket, more complicated than an H-bomb, more complicated than a tropical hurricane. It is the job of the writer to seize the wonders and let the reader see Mankind within himself."

Smith's fiction is an attempt at exactly this sort of evocation. Smith had a far wider and more secure understanding of mystery than Dick. He was respectful of mystery's awesome power, but he was not distrustful or terrified of it, as Dick is distrustful and, at times, even terrified. Smith's great limitation was his inability to communicate his sense of the pervasiveness of mystery, and of the wonder in mystery, to any but the few.

The most important occurrence in science fiction during these dull years of the late Fifties and early Sixties was the appearance of a new generation of sf writers. After ten years in which new writers had all but been frozen out of the field and new writers of true importance non-existent, suddenly there was new blood again. Perhaps there was a realization of the staleness of the field, but for one reason or another, editors once again were prepared to actively seek new talent. Cele Goldsmith Lalli at AMAZING and FANTASTIC and Frederik Pohl at *If* were particularly encouraging to new writers.

Outstanding among the new writers were Samuel R. Delany, Thomas M. Disch, R.A. Lafferty, Ursula K. LeGuin, Anne McCaffrey, Larry Niven, Joanna Russ, Norman Spinrad, and Roger Zelazny. Their discovery was comparable to the discovery of new writers by John Campbell at the end of the Thirties. The year 1962 seems as pivotal as the year 1939. Delany, Disch, LeGuin and Zelazny all first published science fiction in 1962.

Of these, Delany's appearance with a paperback book from Ace was particularly significant. Delany was the first major writer of speculative fantasy to make a reputation without appearing in the science fiction magazines. By the time his first short stories began to appear in 1967, Delany had already published seven original novels in paperback, one of which, *Babel 17* (1966), won the Science Fiction Writers of America Nebula Award. Delany's success may be taken as the first visible confirmation of the shift in publishing emphasis from the magazine to the paperback book that had been taking place in science fiction since 1953 without great public attention.

These new writers were not all of one kind, and they did not immediately remake speculative fantasy. They were apprentices, not masters, learning their trade by trial and error, chiefly appearing in peripheral markets like AMAZING, FANTASTIC and Ace Books. Roger Zelazny, the first of the writers to make his presence felt, appeared eighteen times in AMAZING and FANTASTIC in 1962 and 1963 before publishing "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" in the November 1963 issue of *F&SF*. Those eighteen stories were chiefly exercises of hand, some in the styles of other writers like Harlan Ellison and John Collier. "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" was Zelazny's own voice, and the story was nominated for the Hugo Award.

Though they were not masters, these new writers can be compared to the new experimenters in pop music, Bob Dylan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the Beatles. In both cases the significance of these new artists was not immediately apparent, and in both cases it was ultimately overwhelming. In fact, once again we have a case of changes in sf paralleling changes in other popular media. The commonality in the change was a widespread return to the aesthetic after the didactic Fifties. In comic books, for instance, after years of dull superheroes meant to be watched and admired from a distance, Stan Lee at Marvel introduced a troubled new crew of gifted characters like Spiderman and the Thing, who were less bothered by the standard comic book problems of catching crooks and evildoers, and rather more concerned with the intimate problems of establishing identity and winning social acceptance.

The parallels between speculative fantasy and pop music are particularly striking. Both Bob Dylan and the Beatles, the new great innovators, issued their first records in 1962. Both won acceptance with material in the standard folk-protest and rock'n'roll styles of the day. Then, partly influenced by each other, both converged in 1965 to make the new rock music idiom. Rock music then had a flowering through 1967. It lost the leadership of Dylan with his 1966 motorcycle accident and subsequent long silence. It lost the leadership of the Beatles with their breakup in 1970. Good work has been done in the past six years, but it is apparent that momentum has been lost.

Similarly, speculative fantasy began a new emergence in 1962. It flowered in 1965-1967, and since has lost its bloom again. Not to carry the parallel too far, but the exciting mid-Sixties in sf also had its two leaders, Roger Zelazny and Samuel R. Delany. For the first time since the early Forties and the days of Heinlein and van Vogt, sf clearly had for a few years two writers who were more than merely masters among peers. Zelazny and Delany were not alone. Each of the other writers of their generation has done admired or even prize-winning work. Half-a-dozen of the random writers of the mid-Fifties Lost Generation—Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, John Brunner, Avram Davidson, Harlan Ellison and Robert Silverberg—have also found themselves in the Sixties.

But in the mid-Sixties, Zelazny and Delany led speculative fantasy. Between 1965 and 1967, Zelazny, the more popular in appeal of the two, won two Nebula Awards and two Hugos. Between 1966 and 1969, Delany, the more admired by other sf writers of the two, won four Nebulas and one Hugo.

In the period of their apprenticeship, 1962-1964, the last great techniques necessary for the universal re-establishment of mystery were located. What these amounted to was the successful re-amalgamation of modern science fiction with traditional fantasy. It was a startling brilliant inevitability, and it is not at all surprising that the amalgamation led to immediate, if limited fruitfulness.

Consider: through all the years from Mary Shelley's time to our own, traditional fantasy has continued to be written in spite of its patent implausibility. Seemingly, it should have disappeared long ago. It can only be entertainment. It cannot be taken with ultimate seriousness. It has been so consistent a poor second to the new modern form of sf that technically superior writers of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traditional fantasy like Lord Dunsany and James Branch Cabell have had far less impact and far smaller followings than less adroit and less admirable writers of the new sf like Jules Verne, Edgar Rice Burroughs and E.E. Smith. So great are the natural advantages of plausibility.

Why, then, has traditional fantasy continued to be written? What has continued to attract writers and readers to it despite its implausibility? This is a serious question that cannot be casually dismissed. The answer is not a weak-minded need for escapism and it is not some sort of absurd conservatism. The only meaningful answer is that traditional fantasy has had some quality that neither mimetic fiction nor the new speculative fantasy has been able to offer.

It is not difficult to point to that quality. It is, quite simply, the quality of mystery. Mystery is the one thing, as we have pointed out, that traditional fantasy has in abundance. This is, moreover, not simple mystery, but mystery with clear moral overtones. A robot may be morally neutral. A witch is never morally neutral. Both the mystery and the moral associations of traditional fantasy symbols made them valuable to the new modern form of speculative fantasy, which lacked both.

By the end of the Fifties, the symbols of modern sf had all been established as plausible. They were not mysterious. And as we know, the traditional symbols of sf, while infinitely mysterious, were not plausible. The solution of the Sixties to the problem of the re-establishment of mystery in sf was to combine the new symbols with the old.

This was not an original solution. H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith and C.L. Moore amalgamated new symbols and old in their stories in *Weird Tales* to make horror plausible. Theodore Sturgeon, Lester del Rey and L. Sprague de Camp amalgamated new symbols and old in *Unknown* in order to make the entire range of traditional fantasy symbols plausible. Late stories in this style are Poul Anderson's *Three Hearts and Three Lions* (1953, 1961) and Robert Heinlein's *Glory Road* (1963). That is, Heinlein presents fire-breathing dragons—traditional symbols—but makes them plausible by explaining that they brew marsh-gas in their stomachs. And Anderson's hero, a contemporary engineer transferred into a fantasy alternate universe, defeats a fire-breathing dragon by tossing a half-gallon of water down its throat, causing a boiler explosion.

The new amalgamation, however, was not for the purpose of making traditional fantasy symbols plausible. That good and necessary service had been performed by *Unknown*. This service, we can see in retrospect, was *Unknown's* contribution to the efficient development of the new reformulated World Beyond the Hill.

The point of this new amalgamation in the Sixties was precisely the opposite of its point in *Unknown*. It was not to make traditional fantasy symbols plausible. It was to make the new sf symbols mysterious. Thus, in *The Dragon Masters* (1962), Jack Vance, like Anderson and Heinlein, presents us with dragons. They are explained as selectively bred alien beings—a plausible excuse. But Vance does not explain their dragon-ness away. He maintains it. His creatures are as much dragon as selectively bred alien being.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And in Samuel R. Delany's first novel, *The Jewels of Aptor* (1962, 1968), we encounter werewolves, vampires and ghouls. Delany explains them, more or less, as mutants, but they are far more strongly werewolves, vampires and ghouls than they are mutants.

A balance is struck again in Roger Zelazny's first novel, *This Immortal* (1965). This story is set not thousands or millions of years from now, but only a few hundred years after world-wide atomic war. In this short space of time, certain humans and animals have taken the forms of mythic creatures: satyrs, centaurs, winged horses, and sea serpents. The question whether this development is primarily plausible or primarily mysterious is debated for us by two of Zelazny's characters.

The first, a poet, says, " 'Do you not see a convergence of life and myth, here, during the last days of life on this planet? . . . I mean that as humanity rose out of darkness it brought with it legends and myths and memories of fabulous creatures. Now we are descending again into that same darkness. The Life Force grows weak and unstable, and there is a reversion to those primal forms which for so long existed only as dim racial memories—' "

And the second, a biological engineer, answers, " 'What you have said so far proves nothing other than that in all of infinity there is a possibility for any sort of life form to put in an appearance, given the proper precipitating factors and a continuous congenial environment. The things you have mentioned which are native to Earth are mutations . . .' "

There is no conclusion to the argument. You may take your choice of explanations, if you like. Practically speaking, however, you must accept both. The very fact that there is no conclusion to the argument, that it is left unsettled, permits these creatures to be simultaneously plausible and mysterious. They are not firmly fixed as either. We are given reason to think that they might be either. Therefore, effectively they are both.

During the mid-Sixties, one writer after another adopted the new technique and produced work that was both plausible and mysterious, work that did not force the reader to choose between plausibility and mystery. There were stories of alternate universes more fantastic than our own like Philip José Farmer's *The Maker of Universes* (1965), Avram Davidson's *Masters of the Maze* (1965), and Keith Robert's *Pavane*, which appeared as a series of novelets in the British magazine *Impulse* in 1966. There were stories of a mistily fantastic galactic future like James H. Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres* (1966), the novel version of his 1949 novelet of the same title, which could hardly have been published at any time in between, and Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight* (1967-68). And in his 1967 novel of Armageddon, *Black Easter*, James Blish showed that even an *Unknown*-style story of witchcraft in a contemporary setting could contain mystery.

However, as we have said, two writers, Roger Zelazny and Samuel Delany, stood out in particular during these years of the middle Sixties. The basis of their prominence was the intensity of their concentration on mystery. They led the field in the application of the new insight, and in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heightened use of language, unknown to sf during its cosmic engineering days, which nourished and promoted mystery. The lead character of any 1950 Heinlein story almost necessarily was an engineer with the firmly-held belief that anyone who lacks the ability to work a slide rule is an idiot undeserving of the gift of life. It is no accident that the narrator of "A Rose for Ecclesiastes", Roger Zelazny's first major story, is a poet, or that wounded artists should be Delany's usual protagonists.

Although it is Zelazny who has the M.A. in English, it is Delany who has been the more self-consciously literary of the two. Delany has been a folk singer and a wanderer through the Bohemian quarters of the world, and he has been known to decorate the heads of his chapters with quotations from Bob Dylan, James Joyce, Erasmus, and his own personal journal. Delany packs his stories with highly intellectual symbolism—perhaps not realizing that speculative fantasy is naturally symbolic—and sometimes drowns the meaning of his stories in interfering imagery.

Delany's 1967 Nebula-award winning novel, *The Einstein Intersection,* begins: "There is a hollow, holey cylinder running from hilt to point in my machete. When I blow across the mouthpiece in the handle, I make music with my blade. When all the holes are covered, the sound is sad, as rough as rough can be and be called smooth. When all the holes are open, the sound pipes about, bringing to the eyes flakes of sun on water, crushed metal."

What "crushed metal" may mean is anyone's guess. And it would seem that before a thing can serve an effective symbolic function, it first should plausibly fill its own proper natural role. Delany does not question how effective his machete/flute would be either as a machete or a flute. He is interested in producing literary effects.

In *The Einstein Intersection,* Delany identifies his strange not-quite-human characters with Orpheus, Billy the Kid, Jean Harlow and Jesus Christ. However, this is an unusual excursion. For the most part, Delany has not been interested in following mystery into myth. Instead, he has concentrated on returning life to conventional and familiar science fiction materials by infusing them with mystery. In effect, he has returned the mystery to sf that was wrung from it during the Fifties. However, this has meant that to the casual eye much of Delany's work has looked no different than the adventure fiction once published in *Planet Stories,* the same stuff that has more recently appeared two to a set of covers in Ace Double Books.

In fact, no less than five of Delany's novels have been Ace Double Books, in appearance exactly the same as the light trash they have been bound with. What has ultimately distinguished them has been the cumulative impact of Delany's sense of mystery and his ambitious use of language. Thus, *Second Ending* by James White, bound with Delany's first novel, has been forgotten, while *The Jewels of Aptor,* originally slashed by one-third, has been restored to its intended form and republished. Thus, *The Psionic Menace* by Keith Woodcott and *The Lunar Eye* by Robert Moore Williams are dead, while *Captives of the Flame* (1963), *The Towers of Toron* (1964), and an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ace Single, *City of a Thousand Suns* (1965), Delany's second, third and fourth novels, have been republished in one volume as *The Fall of the Towers*.

To a lesser extent, Zelazny, too, has published transformations of conventional science fiction material. "A Rose for Ecclesiastes", for instance, is set on the same lost-race, planet-of-adventure Mars familiar to us from the stories of Leigh Brackett, and before her, from Edgar Rice Burroughs. But Zelazny, rather more than Delany, has been concerned primarily to pursue mystery to its ultimate end—myth. Myth is fiction that features a mystery so powerful, definite and immediate that it guides and transforms the lives of those who encounter it. Speculative fantasy, when it does become fully mature, will inevitably serve this mythic function. But this will not happen automatically and it may never be possible for a writer to deliberately set out to create myth, as Stapledon did, and simply and surely succeed.

In practice, what Zelazny has done is not to create myth but to adapt it. That is, he has taken the materials of dead myth and married them to modern speculative fantasy, sometimes with success and sometimes not. *The Dream Master* (1966) is a highly intellectual application of the Tristran legend. *Lord of Light* (1967), probably Zelazny's most finished work, is an imaginative and aesthetic rendering of Hindu and Buddhist material. *Creatures of Light and Darkness* (1969)—dedicated to Delany as Delany's novelet, "We, In Some Strange Power's Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line", is dedicated to Zelazny—turns the gods of Egypt into comic book characters zipping lightly about the universe in search of revenge. However, whatever success Zelazny has had in his enterprise has been in producing speculative fantasy, not true myth.

Neither Zelazny nor Delany has been a completely successful writer. Both have indulged themselves in the excesses of youth. By the standards of the guild masters of the Fifties, neither even today knows how to build a well-constructed novel. It would not be inaccurate to call them both immature writers, as most writers who find their first success before they are thirty are immature.

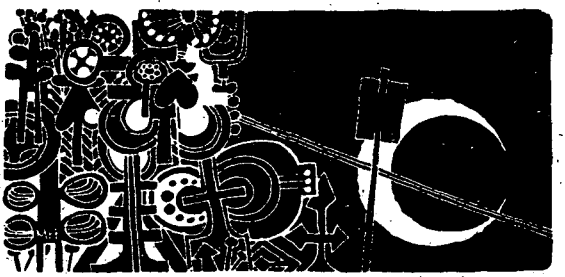
Since *Lord of Light* in 1967, Zelazny has been floundering. He has produced a long series of thoroughly bad books. His skill with language, once his most attractive feature, has seemingly deserted him. From adapting dead myth, Zelazny has turned to inventing dead myth, but all that his gods and heroes, adapted or invented, seem able to do with their extra-normal powers is to hurl lightning and seek revenge. Until Zelazny is able to decide the meaning of his own powers, his own extraordinary talent, little should be expected of him. And for his part, Delany has been absent altogether since 1968, except for one or two minor short stories, working on a single mammoth novel. Such a fallow period or absence is common among sf writers who have had an early success before they found the terms of their maturity. These past few years for Zelazny and Delany may well prove to be the equivalent of, as an example, Philip Dick's silence before he returned to sf with *The Man in the High Castle*.

Limitations aside, the impact of Roger Zelazny and Samuel Delany on sf in the Sixties is undeniable.

(cont. on page 130)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

... According to You



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to According To You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Ted,

No doubt Darrell Scheitzer had good intentions when he wrote the letter you published in the October issue of FANTASTIC. It is good to see some one do some serious thinking about Worldcons and Hugos.

However, I don't think Darrell gave his suggestion enough thought. Allow me to raise a few objections to the idea of Hugo ballots being placed in prozines for the general readership to see.

First of all, for argumentative purposes, let's say that averaged out from all the prozines' circulations, there are only 100,000 (yes, I know that is a ridiculously low figure, however, I'm using it only to illustrate my point) readers. Let's further assume that only one tenth of them vote.

Ten thousand voters would doubtlessly shift the trend of Hugo voting. First of all, since many people who read the prozines are only casual readers of SF, would they read books like *Orbit* or non-SF mags like *Playboy*?

I suspect that the readership of the *Orbit* books is vastly different from the readership of the prozines. Also, a Trufan would buy a copy of *Playboy* that had a story by a big name writer. Mrs. Anybody, who has three pre-teen children, probably would not.

Second, pro writers are divided up into various "camps." This isn't necessarily bad; after all, Gordy Dickson's average story would probably fit better into *Analog* than in AMAZING or FANTASTIC. Nothing bad or evil about that. When people buy *Anolog* they expect to read stories in the *Analog* style (whatever in hell that is) just as when they buy FANTASTIC or AMAZING they expect to read stories in the FANTASTIC/AMAZING style (whatever in hell *that* is).

I'm afraid that if prozines started printing ballots they would naturally start advocating their own types of stories and writers. In which case the zine with the biggest and/or best circulation would win.

Third, what about the fan awards? How many people who read the prozines have ever heard of, much less are aquainted with, the works of Tim Kirk, Vaughn Bode, Harry Warner Jr., or Alicia Austin? How many have read *Locus, Yandro,* or *Mobius Trip?* Not too damn many, I assure you. So who would win the fandom awards?

I'll tell you, Joe Fan and his zine, *Tihs.* Why? because Joe Fan sent in more copies to be reviewed in the prozines or wrote more letters or is good friends with ye olde ed. The fan with the most exposure would win.

Similarly, any fan an editor didn't like would get the ax.

If Darrell Schweitzer's plan had been in effect five or six years ago, Vaugh Bodé would have won the Hugo as best fan artist several years running because of the large number of illos he did for *If* and *Galaxy*.

In general, I think if Darrell Schweitzer's idea was put into effect we'd see more and greater feuds than ever before. Original

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

novels would be ignored for serialized novels; prozines would crowd out original anthologies and stories printed in non-SF publications; fan awards would be handed out on a publicity basis.

The whole point is that the Hugos are fanac, the pride and joy of the more interested SF fans. Hugos should not be available to the general public, they should be kept in the close knit family of fandom.

As for your comments on all night films, allow me to say this. Being a film freak, I am almost compelled to spend every night at cons with all night movies watching the films. As a result, I have missed many interesting parties, orgies, and other fannish get togethers.

Now I've noticed that most film programs consist of George Pal films, Ray Harryhausen/Willis O'Brien monster movies, and *Star Trek* episodes. A lot of the programs are often fillers such as old preview trailers, bloopers, cartoons, and so forth.

Why not devote just one night to movies? And instead of just a grab-bag of films, why not select a basic theme, such as films based on Jules Verne's novels, or a James Bond film festival, or somesuch?

Or ever better, no professional movies at all, but rather a night of amateur SF and fantasy films. This could open up new audiences for many film makers. And films could be premiered at the '75 Worldcon, film chairmen for regional cons could select films to be shown at their cons, and in '76 a new Hugo category could be added, fantasy fan films.

PVT. HUBERT (BUZZ) C. DIXON III
413-90-1390, Co. D, ISC 4
Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Ind. 46216

Your basic point—that the prozine with the largest circulation would pick up most of the Hugos for fiction published within its pages—is probably true. . . if you assume that the same percentage of each magazine's readership will be doing the voting. But some prozines may have a more actively inclined readership; in any case, there are, as you have demonstrated, a number of good arguments against the notion. However, don't be mislead into thinking that the present voting system is superior. The Hugo award for fanzine, for instance, has traditionally gone to the fanzine with the largest circulation—usually a newssheet—with only rare (and distinguished) exceptions over the last nearly twenty years; it is safe to assume that even now the majority of Hugo voters and nominators are not familiar with the fan categories, a fact which leaves some fans bitter on the subject of Hugo fan awards.—TW

Dear Ted,

I am rapidly getting tired of some "trends" in sf. Of course, they're not new. First, I do not like writers that use your magazine as a medium to tell me what I should think. This doesn't mean I object to the stating of what they believe, just them telling me I have to believe something. Second, I am opposed to violence. In stories, it doesn't bother too much. Except when the author overdoes it. They give graphic descriptions of dying people ("Time Killer" is a recent example). I know people like that. They used to pulls flies' wings off, now they talk about car wrecks. It would be better (for me) if they could find a less publicized way of working out their violent sexual abberrations. Third, sex. If people must be weird about it, write about it, and draw it, must you publish it? I think people who write and talk about the sex act have guilt problems. As for me, I am weary of seeing sex in your world. I know what I think, it's enough. Thank you for your time.

M. MCCUISTON
Dallas, Texas.

Dear Ted:

We've been noticing lately, in FANTASTIC and almost everywhere else, letters proclaiming *Star Trek* to be the greatest science-fiction television series ever. To fans of the "Space Opera", this is probably so, but to those of us who enjoy all the various forms of speculative fiction and fantasy, there is a show that is not generally thought of as 'science-fiction' that is eminently more enjoyable, better done, better acted, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more worthwile. Also, the show has one important ingredient that *Star Trek* lacked. Diana Rigg! The show, of course, is *The Avengers.*

What's that? You say it's not a science-fiction show? Tut! Tut! What other than a science-fiction show would have—

—android duplicates (Christopher Lee)

—cybernetic robots (Peter Cushing)

—an invisibility serum

—reducing rays (ala The Incredible Shrinking Man)

—a totally automated house that captures and tortures people

—a murderous laser beam

—soul transference

—boots that walk up walls

—an underground city

—positive-negative men

—an apparent time machine

—an alien plant-form that grew to immense porportions and threatened London, to name a few. Pretty incredible, you say! That's right!

What we want to know is, why have there been no fan cults rising in adulation to this great show? Where is the book on The Making of The Avengers? Where are the Avenger-Cons? Why no posters of Patrick McNee and Diana Rigg? What the Hell's the matter with you all? Patrick McNee could act rings around William Shatner! Diana Rigg was sexier than Spock will ever be!

Why doesn't somebody do something?

BRIAN CRIST & STEVE SWENSTON
324 Candy Lane
Santa Rosa, Calif. 95401

Ahhh, don't look now, fellas, but there is *an* Avenger *fandom, fanzines and all! Maybe now that you've come out into the open, they'll make contact with you. . . but in the meantime I should remark that although I enjoyed the show very much I did not think the "science" was on a very high level in most episodes, and I prefered to take it less than totally seriously.*—TW

Dear Ted,

I agree with Jerry Lapidus; somehow the Panshins' analysis of van Vogt's *The World of Null-A* seemed a bit too much to accept. I ran across something in *Speculation* recently that might explain why their analysis seems faulty: "The purpose of symbols in a novel is to illuminate and make more powerful the ideas they symbolize; to do that they. . . must take an immediate effect on the reader; they must be plausible and interesting in themselves; and so a novel must be successful on a literal level before it can be successful on a symbolic level." So, if *The World of Null-A* is full of as much sloppy writing and poor logic as eveyone says, no amount of symbolism the Panshins manage to find in it is going to make it a good book. After all, you can find symbolism in anything if you look hard enough—it's more the work of the critic than the writer.

It was also rather tiring to read, more recently, the Panshins' claim that an old E.E. Smith book was inherently better than a best-selling mainstream novel from the same period. I can't see how the Panshins' position regarding this is any better than that of the mainstream critic who arrogantly says that all sf is inherently trash, no good, etc. I can't see how one form of intolerance is better than the other.

Jerry Lapidus' suggestion about seperating the membership in the World-con from the Hugo voting is a good one, but, like you've mentioned previously, there's always the problem of who shall administer the Hugo awards if the Worldcon committee doesn't. Perhaps, though, the Worldcon committee could still be left in charge of the Hugo voting, but just the administration of the Hugo votes and Worldcon seperated, so if you wanted to vote you wouldn't necessarily have to be a member of the Worldcon, and if you wanted to be a Worldcon member you wouldn't necessarly have to vote.

CY CHAUVIN
17829 Peters
Roseville, Michigan 48066

I think you missed the point. The Panshins were not saying that The World of Null-A *was "a good book;" nor were they saying*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the symbolism made *it a good book. They were saying, in effect, "Look, here is this badly written, badly plotted book, and when it came out, nearly everyone* loved *it, including John W. Campbell. Why?" And their answer was that the readers responded unconsciously to its powerful (if rather inchoate) symbolism. And I agree completely—I* loved *the Null-A books,* Slan, *and van Vogt's other early "classics," and I've reread them several times, even though I recognize their deficiencies as good literature, or even as good sf. I am grateful to the Panshins for putting their fingers on what it was I* did *respond to in those books. Have* you *read them yet, Cy?*—TW

Dear Ted,

Two principles every SF editor should be aware of:

1) The brighter the cover, the brighter the contents.

You should be winning over tens of thousands of new readers with your new covers. The heavier stock appears to be making an impression on people I talk to as well as other editors. (Note how the covers for the *Orbit* series are getting darker as the contents, save for Lafferty, Wolfe and Wilhelm stories, worsen.) The cover for Conan story issue of FANTASTIC was a dubious one using the brightness principle.

2) The longer the story, the more readers will like it.

This is easily proven by the AnLab results printed in *Analog*. Note how novelettes generally win out over short stories even when they are inferior. After all, the reader concludes, doesn't the writer work harder on a novelette than on a short story? It is longer, therefore, it is more difficult to produce.

You mighty try an experiment with longer short stories, good ones, to see if they beat the other magazines.

But there is a problem for the editor who tries to use the principle of the longer the story the better the rating to bolster his magazine—when the best stories of the year are selected the best story for a particular class (short story, novelette or novella) is not necessarily the longest. Good stories are still good stories, or better, and that perhaps shows a superficiality in the rating system often employed in rating individual issues of prozines.

I'll freely admit that I am not a Conan fan. I've found myself with more tolerance for the comic book than for the books. And I dislike the idea of continuing a series of a long-dead writer. Carter is an excellent editor and a competent fan writer, but I have found few of his stories that I have liked. de-Camp is an excellent writer who has come up with good commentary on the history of fantasy but the extension of Conan would seem to me a step down for him as well as for Carter. Printing stories on Conan may, however, increase your readership among younger readers. I don't know if it increases the level of storytelling but the level of writing is good, though, being the umpteenth in a series seems hackwork—competent hackwork.

My evaluation of both AMAZING and FANTASTIC is still: read the serial, read the features, read the letters and the editorial and hope to God that the short stories get better.

JOHN ROBINSON
I—101st Street
Troy, NY 12180

The cover for the August (20th Anniversary) issue was an experiment of sorts, in collaboration with artist Jeff Jones, to see if an eye-catching and attractive cover could be done without *bright colors. And most readers enjoy longer stories, I think, because they offer more meat—more rounded characterization, more plot—than short stories; not because they feel the author has worked harder. Unfortunately, we have only so much space in any given issue, and that means that when we run a really long instalment of a serial (or a complete short novel), the remaining space must be given over to much shorter stories, if we are to retain any variety in the contents of the issue. An editor's life, you see, is full of compromises.*—TW

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dear Mr. White,

I was delighted to see a new story by one of my favorite authors, Gardner Fox, in the October issue. You were wrong, however, in saying it was his debut in FANTASTIC. He had an excellent little story called "Heart of Light" in the March, 1968, issue. Hope it won't be another 4 years before his next appearance. The story surprised me since I expected something like his sword & sorcery hero Kothar, and Conmoral could not have been more different. Eric Frank Russell's story was another nice addition. I first came in contact with this talented author's work more than a decade ago when I read "The Space Willies." We heroic fantasy enthusiasts certainly have nothing to complain about in the August and October issues. I didn't much care for your illustrations of Conan. It seems the Frank Frazetta covers for the Lancer novels much better depict the character of the Cimmerian superman. But then who can get worked up over a couple of illustrations when they accompany a very well done story.

I was sorry to hear Piers Anthony's "Hasan" has still not found a publisher. It remains my favorite among all the novels appearing in FANTASTIC since 1968 when I started buying the magazine. I guess that just shows how severely the literary tastes of one person can differ from those of another, which is why I believe 90% of the time someone says "A is a better writer than B," he is just stating his own prejudices and bent toward a specific style.

What do you think of the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series Lin Carter is Editing? Through it I've become acquainted with the writing of William Morris, Lord Dunsany, and other earlier writers in the field. I've been surprised your magazine of science fiction and *Fantasy* hasn't discussed this, to me, worthwhile attempt to bring the fantasy of the past to a new generation of readers.

I own a half dozen issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES from 1947-49 and don't think the stories are as atrocious as you portrayed them. I rather like most of what appeared in them. Of course the audience of 1947 and the audience of 1972 would not react the same way to any story, but a story should be read in terms of the audience it was written for. It's possible to enjoy a mystery written a quarter century ago although the modern reader fully realises the police, legally at least, can not act now as they do in the book. Similarly it should be possible to enjoy early science fiction although modern discoveries make the author's science seem unreasonable. Moreover, since fantasy need have no scientific rationale, it should well be ageless, as I think the stories of William Morris and other are, although they naturally reflect the author's life experience to a degree.

I just bought the Lancer edition of Moorcock's *Sleeping Sorceress*, and the full novel leads to a result sharply different from what anyone reading the segment published by you would suspect.

I hope Lin Carter and Gardner Fox will be appearing again in the upcoming months. These last two issues were just so well done I'm waiting with more interest than usual to see what will be appearing next.

DOUGLAS W. JUSTICE
2154 East Ridge Road
Rochester N.Y. 14622

Without checking back over my files right now, I am reasonably certain that Fritz Leiber did deal with several of Ballantine's Adult Fantasy books in earlier Fantasy Books columns. *However, you're right that we haven't commented on the series recently, and we'll try to rectify that, since I share your opinion of their overall high quality. (Now, if Ballantine would just put us on their review list. . .)*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Having just finished reading the current issue of FANTASTIC, I felt coerced to write and accentuate on how much I enjoyed Rich Brown's story. Having written a few short stories myself and in turn collecting rejection slips for them, I can personally identify with the Rich Brown in the story. Each time you send out one of your arduous literary creations and it returns with a rejection slip, all you can do is start over again and try to correct what you think you did wrong. However

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this does not suppress the feeling that your stories are getting a preconceived and concise look. This feeling can only be alleviated by a sale. But until that time what would you suggest to the new writers, trying to break into the field that would mitigate their temporary setbacks?

Yours Truly
C.C. CLINGAN
1254 Leah Court
Oroville Calif, 95965

An overweaning ego certainly helps, but, failing that, clean typewriter keys, a sharp ribbon, careful attention to spelling and puncuation, and perseverance. Seriously, the only preconceptions an editor takes with him to each new submission are those qualities which he thinks are required for a good story. Satisfy him on that score, and you've made his day a happy one.—TW

Dear Ted:

Had to tell you:

First action after ogling at the obviously censored pic on page 6, Oct. FANTASTIC& thumbed through for more such pics.

There is no illo on p. 6, J.R.—TW

Didn't find any. Disappointment! In fast I didn't even get to the "big offer" at the back (that offer's as disappointing as the lack of more such pics and for the same reasons). No, I stopped at "Dear Ted."

I read every one of the 3500 words—and I can't read.

I don't believe it, but you know, if those stupid dates weren't there I might have, at least through the first reading.

Now, back to the pic on pg 6. Me, not you; you're married.

Did you know marriage ruins sex life?

It's true. Studies show that in a high percentage of married men they have but one woman after they tie the knot, unless, of course, they divorce which wrecks a marriage.

Lately, I criticized (I think in a good way) both publicly and privately the format of both A&F, but I went back the other day through some old issues. The difference between the old and new is startling. But please avoid self-pleasure—that leads to stagnation—stagnation leads to a worn format.

Change! Change! Change!

It's like my Mammy always told me about my shorts: "They may not be worn out, but change 'em anyways!"

I'd like to add a note which might ease the situation with the Worldcons, though I know it won't be the first time someone suggested it.

As you know most conventions of any size are staged by at least a loosely knit organization with a continuing governing body which allows for money from past ventures to be handed to the next.

While I know a majority of fandom likes to hang loose, avoiding organization often to the point of disorganization, I think the time ripe for at least some sort of continuing committee with its hands on some purse strings—a non-profit corporation for the advancement of science fiction or fandom.

Such an outfit could solve pre-convention financial problems by covering early expenses, and if needed, backing the convention and hotel with promises of a certain number of room reservations—maybe reserving rooms in a block at cut rates.

The committee and even future conventions could be supported by a small membership fee, say a $1 and operate off interest, using the principal as collateral.

Several services of much value could be provided without requiring members to form a tightly grouped organization or following any particular set of directives.

This as been a pet idea of mine and I'd like to hear comments from others, first to feel out the support for such an idea as a non-profit corp and to fill in the gaps as far as ideas. I can't promise a response to every letter, my typing finger can't cut it, but I'll try.

J. R. YEARWOOD
2760 Sargent Ave.
San Pablo, Ca. 94806

Something roughly similar to what you suggest was tried—with disasterous results—in 1956-58, when the World Science Fiction Society, Inc., was formed. It was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

overwhelmingly rejected by the membership of the 1958 Worldcon (the Solacon, in South Los Angeles), after its two-year history had been scarred with lawsuits and much unpleasantness. In principle the idea is a good one. In fact, finding personnel to staff and run it would be difficult since—because fandom is after all just a hobby—only those whose motives are in some fashion suspect would be likely to volunteer for such a Committee. And these people trust each other least of all—as past and present history makes all too obvious. I think it more likely that your suggestion would fit in better with the concept of the Worldcon as a Trade Exposition, operated on a professional basis. Under such circumstances, responsible personnel could be hired and salaried to do the job. But this, I suspect, is no more likely than the opposite eventuality. . . —TW

Dear Mr. White,

The December issue of FANTASTIC was the best issue in general that you've published in the ten months since the February issue which featured Michael Moorcock's "The Sleeping Sorceress" of the Elric series. Of the short stories, only "Who's Afraid" I found lacking, but what could one expect of a werewolf story? And the two stories which fit neither the science fiction mold nor the fantasy mold, those of Alexei Panshin and F.M. Busby, were, perhaps unjustly, the two best pieces of fiction in the issue. "The Fallible Fiend" I found, however, boring. (Please don't tar and feather me yet!) But it was more than made up for by the good short stories, the portfolio, and the features. I'm not a fantasy fan for the most part, but I found "Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers" exceptionally interesting this issue. I know I'll never have the patience to sit down with a fantasy novel, novella, or even novelet and read it all the way through, but I sometimes like reading *about* such things as L. Sprague deCamp talked about in his article this issue. I was fascinated by the Panshins' article about what must have been *the* golden age of magazine science fiction, the era from 1936 or perhaps more definitely 1939 to 1946. I wasn't born yet then, so the article filled in a lot of gaps in my knowledge about that period, as well as increasing my craving for reprints of those great stories by Russell, del Rey, Asimov, and company which I've seen all too few of in my few brief years of reading sf. The lettercol and the editorial were interesting as usual, your pronouncements on the plight of the preservationists in your small town making me *envious* because in a big city like mine the preservationists face tougher battles by far with the forces of self-defined progress. But we do sometimes win down here.

Also in your editorial you said that you'd be using more fantasy from now on (and, of course, less science fiction) in FANTASTIC. This I take as *bad* news, because I'm an sf fan but not a fantasy buff. But in any event I hope you remember that FANTASTIC is supposed to be a magazine of "science fiction *and* fantasy stories," and I think the least you could do is to give *half* of the fiction space to sf. Already *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* includes more (much more) fantasy than sf, and there *are* only 48 science-fiction magazine issues published each year all totaled.

And lastly just what did the cover of this issue represent or symbolize, or was it supposed to represent or symbolize anything? I'll be darned if I know.

LESTER BOUTILLIER
2726 Castiglione Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

By my calculations, there are thirty issues of sf magazines published annually, versus eighteen issues of fantasy magazines—assuming you count F&SF and FANTASTIC *in the latter category. This still leaves the sf magazines with a hefty superiority in numbers, especially when you consider that both F&SF and this magazine also publish sf, while out-and-out fantasy rarely, if ever, appears in the straight-sf magazines. I feel there is a growing audience for good fantasy of all types, and one which can find satisfaction only in F&SF and here. For that reason, I've tried to broaden our coverage of the fantasy spectrum in recent issues with novels like Davidson's "The Forges of Nainland Are Cold," de Camp's "The Fallible*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fiend, and the Panshins' "The Son of Black Morca"—full-length works of fantasy—as well as de Camp & Carter's Conan stories, another of which is coming up next issue. I'm sorry fantasy bores you, Lester; I suggest you approach it with a more open mind. These are novels of no less fascination than sf, and written by the same authors whose sf you may admire. Give them a chance; they're worth it.—TW

Ravages Of Spring (cont. from page 121)

gaped, and the fist at her bosom opened and closed convulsively. It was not my savage wrath she was afraid of. I carried the children, the living and the dead, to the kitchen, and laid them on the table.

"I need more light," I said.

She went weeping and quaking away to some dark recess and emerged a moment later with lamp. She placed it on the table and lit it. As the flame leaped up, I reached toward the two who were living, to move them away, a little, from the corpse. As my hands drew near, their tiny mad eyes snapped suddedly into focus and their hands reached out to catch hold of me. I jerked back as I would if those wrinkled white hands were snakeheads. The old woman bent close—watching me, not the children—and though tears ran down her cheeks like rain, the evil, toothless mouth seemed to be smiling. Shakespeare had his head in the open door, silently urging me to hurry, there was very little time. A tingle of fear came over me, one that I remembered. I glanced around the table as if to see what I'd spilled or disturbed, but there was nothing, which faintly puzzled me. I concentrated again on the pitiful creatures. Their hands were raised, waiting, and their eyes had me nailed as a cat's eyes nail a mouse before she strikes. My mind was full of wind, reeling and shrieking, but the whole world outside was calm, waiting without hope or plan, with the vast and sorrowful gentleness of a deathly-sick horse.

Then, very slowly, I lowered my hands towards the children. Their fingers closed around my wrists—fingers wierdly unawkward for their age—and when I'd gotten my hands around their backs and raised them to my chest, they clung to my ears, my glasses, my nostrils, as if no tornado on earth would shake them free. When the leering old woman reached out to them, joyful, they shrank, sucked in air, and screamed. They were out of the woods.

The widow helped me to bury the dead one in a grove behind the house, with whippoorwills for preacher and only the sunken place in the ground as memorial. Then I loaded the living ones, wrapped in old blankets, in the back of the gig, and we started home. It was dawn, deathly calm. All the birds had stopped singing, and the sky was green. I spoke with old Shakespeare, as he guided us along, of animals, and monsters, and the nature of things.

—JOHN GARDNER

Bird-Song (cont. from page 90)

"At any rate, the Professor learned how to understand music," she said.

"I wish I could."

"You listen carefully to Dicky, and you'll learn a great deal," said Mrs. Tokkin.

—WILMAR H. SHIRAS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Black Morca (cont. from page 45)
the attackers, Lothor seized Morca's black beard in tight laced fingers and brought the power of Chastain down on Morca's head. But bull Morca's chief strength was sturdier than Lothor's stick. The scepter broke with the second blow and Morca's head did not.

Morca reared, his great heavy chair toppling backwards slowly. No one else in the world could have disturbed it so lightly. He dragged Lothor to his feet by his beard-tangled fingers. Then Morca swung his great arm and stumbling Lothor of Chastain was knocked to the floor senseless. Morca was a strong man.

Black Morca spread his arms wide and in his bull bellow he cried, "For your lives and for Morca! *Alf Morca Gettha!*"

Men thrilled to the sound of his voice. With his slogan still ringing, Morca drew his sword. He placed a foot on Lothor to steady him and split him like a log on the chopping block. The Princess Marthe screamed to see her father so sudden dead. With one great hand Morca upset the tableboard before him, dishes flying, kicked the golden dowry of Chastain out of his way, and strode down to the cutting floor red sword in hand to wade in blood.

In the first moment, men stood throughout the room shaking the fog from their heads and the meat from their poinards. They drew their swords and turned to meet the killing tide. They frantically tried to sort friend from foe. They were far outnumbered and shock, dismay and gorged bellies made them slow.

Soren Seed-sower and Furd Heavy-hand, their quarrel forgot, stood together side by side to face the weight of onslaught. They met it and held, fighting like true Gets, like true loyal men. Then they were overwhelmed and they died. They were only the first.

There was no quarter here. Egil, Heregar the Headstrong and the rest who came through the doors, Lothor's knights who followed, and Aella and Ivor, the traitors within, meant to kill every man.

Old Svein on his stair, no fighting man for twenty years, turned and scrambled upstairs for his stool. But not to sit, not to cower. He gripped his stool with his left arm as a shield and with his eating knife as his weapon he strove to hold the stair. It was all he knew to do. And hold the stair he did against all attackers, turning them back in ones, twos and threes. They could not bring him down. Then Aella of Long Barrow, that man, leapt up from beside the stair and seized the old man's ankle and toppled him. Aella set his knee on Svein's thin old chest and showed him no mercy. He slit his throat in a stroke.

The room was bloody chaos, filled with shouts and slogans, cries of pain, and the groans of the felled as they were trampled and kicked by the standing. The torches leapt with the cool touch of night and the hot breath of battle, swaying to the surge of the dance of death, uncaring and unconcerned high above the fray. Some few of Morca's men sought to escape the maelstrom by following the screaming serving women within the kitchen or plunging through the doors into the night, but most stood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their ground, falling back toward Morca when he bellowed his call, dying hard, earning their deaths by dealing death.

Morca was a giant. His sword was a circle of death for any who dared to close with him. He lifted fallen men to their feet. He inspired dead men to fight on. He was the center of the room. He was captain and king.

"Alf Morca Gettha!"

Haldane followed Morca down to the floor. He stood on his chair and stepped to the tabletop, for he did not have Morca's strength to push tables aside with a hand, and then he jumped down to the floor, banging one knee and rising with sword in hand.

"To me, Hemming. To me," he called, and Hemming Paleface came to him.

He and Hemming stood together and guarded each other's backs. Haldane was both thrilled and afraid. So this was battle! At last. At last. His heart resounded.

He knew their cause was dire, but how dire he did not realize. He did not know he was a dead man in his first battle with only the moment of his death undetermined. He had no time to think. He set aside his fear and fought.

He caught blows on his sword that numbed his arm and he dealt strokes that brought blood. He was wounded and did not feel the pain. His throat was raw from battle cries he never heard. There was the flavor of iron in his mouth. His sword was tight locked one moment and he tasted the ugly breath of the Get he fought, brown beard, yellow teeth, one dogtooth missing: Heregar the Headstrong. No, a smoothshaven knight of Chastain. No, another Get. In other moments his sword's world was empty as far as it could reach. He braced his back against Hemming, his one support, and he braced Hemming in turn. When Morca called his slogan, he strove to reach the sound of his father's voice, Hemming following. And then, of a sudden, his back was empty.

Haldane was lying against something unyielding that pressed into his back and hurt him. He was kicked as he lay. His mind was a sickening whirlpool. Then he found himself on his knees. There was wetness running into his right eye and he cleared it with the back of his hand.

He wasn't sure where he was. What was happening? He was confused and sick.

Before him on the rushes was a dead man. Blood ran from the dead man's nose and mouth and was clotted in his beard and mustache. Haldane knew him. Knew him? It was his dear old Rolf who had taught him to ride and shoot, now beyond any use of forks or strings. As dead as . . .

Everywhere around Haldane there was death. The room was full of dead man, Gets and foreigners. Everywhere around Haldane there was noise and tumult. War. The battle continued in knots, but everywhere many against few. And there lay Hemming Paleface dead, his head split, brains a-dribble.

Then Haldane recovered some of his mind. He knew where he was. He did not know what had happened to him, but he knew what was happening.

Black Morca still stood, but he stood alone. He had been wounded many

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

times, the great bull beset by wolves. He bellowed in pain and he bellowed in fury, but he was dying bravely and his dangerous horns kept the yapping giant killers at a distance. His sword sang a song of death and his poinard played harmony. But he was encircled and his end was close.

Haldane tried to come to his rescue, but he could not gain his feet. He crawled forward desperately over rushes and bodies and the scattered trash of the dowry, his dowry, dragging his sword with him. Then he saw Oliver a double armslength distant on the dais, crouched beneath a table. He was mumbling and moving his hands through the slow middle figures of a spell. And then Oliver stood, an eye-catching figure in his magenta robes, calling down the Chaining of Wild Lightning on their heads, the Ultimate Spell to kill the many, as the Gets had been slain at Sone Heath, that would kill himself, too, as the wizards of the West had perished with their triumph.

Haldane found himself mumbling, too, the only spell he knew, the Pall of Darkness, as though by chanting his little spell he could be of aid to Oliver. He remembered the words, he remembered the motions of hand, and did not know how he remembered. And he hoped for magical deliverance. Anything that would save them.

Oliver made his gestures and said his words. He was magnificent, rising, growing, spreading, becoming great. The last figure was traced. The last word was spoken. He stood with arms spread, waiting for the white tongues of flame that would lash down and destroy the destroyers. Fire that would know whom to strike.

But no flame came.

Nothing happened. Nothing!

The fighting continued as though Oliver had spoken not a word.

And Black Morca was a dead man. The wolves closing, tightening their little circle, dragged down the great bull. They overbore him by weight of number. And the finishing strokes were made by Ivor Fish-eye, the traitor. He waited his chance and when Morca was engaged he slipped in behind him and killed him with a knife thrice plunged into his back. Then he held the bloody knife high in exultation.

There were tears in Haldane's eyes and his mind was a morass. His whole world lay slain. Murdered. Dead.

He came at last to his feet, his lips moving through the last automatic mumble of the Pall of Darkness. He nearly fell. He stumbled against the dais. He finished the spell leaning against a table. The old wave of cold he had known before rolled over him again. He was invisible to men's eyes, though the gods could see him still.

The carrion wolves set up a gay savage howl: "Black Morca is dead! Morca is slain! We have killed him!"

They pranced around the body of the fallen king and made much of themselves. They leaped in to hack at his bones. Men smeared themselves in his blood, painting their faces red with his death. They vied to cut off his parts and hold them up to show. Others turned to the scattered gold of the dowry, picking up prizes to keep.

But their work was not done. Egil Two-Fist, who led them, yelled, "Make sure of Morca's cub! He must be killed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too. Find him."

That was Haldane. Haldane the invisible. Haldane the disappeared.

A sudden shattering hand fell on Haldane's shoulder.

—to be continued—

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

Rags (cont. from page 80)

ordered Rags out of the room. He bounded out of the room, a piece of roach still hanging from his gum. Joanna followed and closed the door behind her. She could hear Sandra's screams inside her head; they made her eyes water. She sat down in the chair by the window and watched the street.

JOANNA HAD WASHED her hair and combed it dry with her fingers. She had sprayed the room and opened up a can of tuna. Everything was clear and real—but I must keep Rags, she thought. She could still hear screams inside her head, but they were turning to whispers. Joanna watched a few people hurrying down the street, handkerchiefs to their faces.

It was late—Joanna could stand up and squeeze her breasts now. She touched the tiny lumps and giggled. But she would not stand up; she would not do anything. Rags stood beside her and sniffed at the can of fish still in her hand.

And Joanna watched a few boys build a fire across the street for the dead.

—JACK DANN

But the Other Old Man (cont. from page 81)

danced and wrapped about him like a shawl. It warmed him in frail melody, counting out his years; it applauded him quietly and eased the pain of remembering.

"Listen," he said quietly, "don't worry about a thing. The hell with the rest of them, Ditkas and Politos and all those bastards. You and me, satyr, there's plenty for both of us. What's a few sheep anyway? You make me a tune and I'll make you a . . . a home. So what if we're old? Hell, we'll live forever."

He laughed and lurched against the stiffness of his legs as he stood. He began clapping, quietly, and shuffling his feet in a dance he thought he'd buried.

"You and me," he muttered as he moved into the rain. "You and me, old friend, until the temples fall." Then he slipped and fell and his breath came hard and he was dizzy. "Boy!" he said, "I'm older than I thought. And you know something, old friend? I don't think I can get up again. I don't think I can. Tell me, old friend, if I die could you teach the sheep to dance to your pipes?"

Suddenly he had to gasp for air, and when the spasm was over, he rolled to his back and let the rain fall into his eyes and mouth. So, Nikos, he thought, you're going to die and leave a god behind you. He tricked you good, you old fool. You'll never learn, will you.

And he listened to the thunder and imagined he heard the sea; and he lay still waiting. . . for the syrinx to sing a triumph.

But the other old man stopped playing.

—C. L. GRANT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editorial (cont. from page 4)

Next there's Omar Pounder, our local sheriff. He got his job because he's 5'9" on all sides. We use him as a roadblock to keep out undesirables. Omar believes in enforcing the law to the hilt. Any law for that matter since he makes up most of it as he goes along. Omar, when in a peculiar mood has come up with some doosies. Like the time when he declared it illegal for pedestrians to make U turns when walking along main street or when he arrested people for working on Sunday, beginning with our local Right Reverend Jeremiah Fulla. In both cases the mayor had to step in and declare the laws another void. In the case of the Right Reverend he waited three days. The following week the Reverend delivered a spirited sermon about what some good Christians ought to do about the powers of some particular Caesar and rendering him a well placed kick in the pants. Anyway, Omar Pounder comes into my pipe-tobacco-candy and tool shop for his Virginia Slim's and his favorite magazine, FANTASTIC.

Third in line is Elmira Breek. She's our only school marm. Some say since the Louisiana Purchase. She's never forgiven me for nailing her pointer in a vertical position onto her swivel chair. She comes to pick up her pile of magazines for the library. This she does every third Friday of the month. Late on every Thursday of the month I remove several of my more specialized magazines to my stockroom and arrange by the front racks her usual order. Whenever she comes into my establishment I tend to light my biggest, smelliest cigar, I suppose to lend atmosphere to my place. To put it mildly she hates my guts and that fact alone has provided endless hours of enjoyment to me.

Lastly there's Michael Asarcaph. He's twelve years old, looks thirty and thinks he's a mushroom. Nobody has ever been able to find out whether he is of the edible variety or not and nobody seems anxious to try. Sometimes when I pass his house I see him under the porch with his fingers rooted in the dirt. Even the neighborhood kids are afraid of him. They think if he touches them they'll get warts. That, Ted, is the kind of readership you have.

The whole mess started when by accident old Breek got a hold of one of your magazines by mistake. It was all that mushroom's fault. I never really see him enter my store because he's only four feet tall and it's only when I walk around from the counter that I see he's rooted his little Buster brown-gray shoes on the floor of my shop. Sometimes he's there for over an hour reading your magazine and I won't even know it. His grey little hands scrunching your magazine with a sponge-like absorption. When I catch him at it he scampers out.

What brought on the trouble is that he has a habit of hiding your magazine behind some of the others so that no one will buy his own personal copy. That's how by accident old Breek got a copy of one of your magazines in with her regular selections. So in she comes a week later screeching like an unoiled hinge on a barn door and not looking much different either. She starts asking me, What kind of a smut parlor are you running here? I give her my number two hound-dog look since I was pretty sure I had removed all of my more choice material to the backroom before she came for her stuff. All this time she was waving a copy of one of your magazines in front of my face. Then her bony finger of contention directed me toward pages where she'd circled in red a few, what she termed, unspeakable words. She was in such a state that the bloodclot in her left eyeball was dilating and contracting with each new word she pointed to. She asked if I was aware that this sort of thing was in the magazines I sold? Now the only magazine I ever read was the *Palm Readers Guide To Objectionable Gestures*. So like the cat that had already swallowed the canary I was able to deny any knowledge that this sort of thing was going on. Of course she knew better and began telling everybody that I'm the local porno man in town.

Then Rev. Fulla, who ran out of things to inveigh against after he exhausted the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rendering unto Caesar with a vengeance sermon, began preaching against the evil ways of the flesh and those who profit thereby. I solved that problem by offering him a special discount on my more specialized magazines and he gave me his clerical dispensation and a free ticket to the next Play Bingo With The Lord Bazaar.

After a while things began to quiet down again. To some people I had become the proverbial smut peddlar but then on the other hand my business had picked up.

In fact that's what led to the next bit of trouble. You see, I usually stock about four copies of your magazines. But ever since old Breek told the kiddies in her class about all the vile and nasty things going on in your magazines I just haven't been able to keep up with demand. Even the mushroom has been buying his very own copy. I told the distributor to send me eight copies and he sends six and so on. But then on the other hand and there is always another hand, Sadie Lickum's, who is a notorious nose-picker and thereby leaves page markings, now no longer buys a copy. She now spouts sayings like rip off the pigs and just reads the copies as far as she can before I catch her and marks the pages with her disgusting nose pickings so she can carry on some other time where she'd left off. I couldn't really stop her entering my store since she is related to the town mayor by a best-left-undiscussed set of circumstances.

Shortly after one of Sadie Lickum's visits I heard that familiar rumbling noise along the wooden boardwalk that I had come to associate with Omar Pounder. Omar usually had very little to say when he came into the store except maybe something like "Let me make one thing perfectly clear" and then usually began to hyperventilate until he gurgitated his closing line, "and don't let me catch no communist pinko's around here."

Believe me when I say that the sight of Omar blocking out one third of my store is impressive enough; but seeing all 300 lbs. of Omar billowing and throbbing at tidal pitch because his copy of FANTASTIC had snot all over it was almost more than I could take. I said, Look, Omar, don't be upset. I'll get you another copy. But I was all out of copies and Omar was in a funk. The next thing I learned was that Omar was walking down main street and declaring it illegal for people to smoke in public because it pollutes the atmosphere and that all those making noise above a certain decible level, which he refuses to divulge, will be arrested on the charge of sabotaging the American way. This time the mayor couldn't intervene since Omar had him arrested for holding a public rally. When the mayor pointed out to Omar that this rally had taken place four months ago, Omar fined him for resisting arrest. Well the matter was finally cleared up when the mayor promised to have a talk with Omar's arch rival and nemesis Sadie Lickum's.

The worst of it all came last month when by some mixup I ran short of your magazine, and God help us all, Omar didn't get his copy. First of all, Omar collapsed and crushed my counter and sent me crashing into the wall racks. Everything came tumbling down, the pickle jars, the sorghum and wheat cannisters, and all the blue milk of magnesia bottles. The place was a mess. After he regained consciousness he charged out of the store and declared marshall law for the whole town.

He's now taken to sending out press releases from his office stating that he is combatting a Communist conspiracy. I've been thrown in jail because he thinks I'm a regional Commissar of the movement.

Oh, I tried to explain to him that all he had to do was to contact you and that you could set him straight. That you could tell him it was all some sort of distribution problem you were having. At this suggestion he began to foam at the mouth and billow and his weight had that tidal wave effect and all he could mutter was that I was trying to brainwash him. I told him that was impossible.

Jeremiah, who at first began to inveigh against the ungodly, the heathen and bar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

baric Communist conspiracy and was having a wopping good time at it, just couldn't see the larger implications. Then it dawned on him we wouldn't get his cherished magazines any more and began trying to convince Omar that killing a Commie for Christ was not quite what the bible had in mind. Comrade Fulla, as we now affectionately call him, is occupying the cell next to mine as I write this letter to you asking you to help us.

Sadie Lickum's, who so far has eluded Omar's grip, is now our only hope. I've given her this letter to mail to you and I can tell you her blackmailing bargaining terms were absolutely demonic. I finally gave in. Figuring she might even make a good co-owner of the store at that.

I'm sure, Ted, that you never realized what effect your magazine was capable of having on deranged people, but there you have it. Besides having organized a special force to be on the look out for all pinko's and unidentified flying objects, Omar is now demanding that he be given an honorary lifetime subscription to your magazines and his own column from which he can warn the country of all sorts of Commie plots like trying to pollute our national essence by flouridating our waters.

I hope you can figure out a solution to this situation but what ever you do, do it quick. I got to sign off now since I hear some thumping boots coming down the cell block.

Your local dealer in distress,

—FRANK ECK

EDITORIAL ADDENDA: This issue marks the publication of the first installment of the Panshins' epic fantasy, "The Son of Black Morca." This novel is something of a departure for both the Panshins and this magazine. To deal with the latter case first, we are serializing "The Son of Black Morca" in three parts instead of our customary two. There are several reasons for this, among them the fact that the novel (itself the first of a trilogy) is divided into three parts and thus lends itself to serialization in three instalments. Another is the length of the novel: to run it in our customary two parts would be to fill most of the pages of this issue and next with nothing else, and that would overbalance those issues to the exclusion of most of the shorter fiction.

The novel is also a significant change for the Panshins: their first novel-length work to be written in collaboration and the first of Alexei's works to be out-and-out fantasy. Nevertheless, readers who enjoyed Alexei's Nebula-Award-winning *Rite of Passage* will find here the same careful attention to the details of the protagonist's growth to maturity and the same vivid craftsmanship of people and place.

Coincidentally, the Panshins' historical survey of sf begins to draw to a close this issue; "The Search for Mystery" deals with the events of the recent past. Next issue they wrap it all up with an explanation and summation, "The Search for Renewal," and offer what I believe to be the best description of what sf must next achieve in its continuing evolution.

What particularly excited me about next issue's *SF in Dimension* was the fortuitous circumstance in which I was handed both it and a new novel by Jack Dann to read on the same evening in Philadelphia, during this year's annual Phillycon. Immediately after finishing the Panshin's "The Search for Renewal" I picked up and began to read the manuscript of "Junction," Jack Dann's short novel.

As I began to read that novel, I was struck, time and again, by the parallels between what the author was doing and what the Panshins had been describing. When I at last finished the manuscript, I was stunned—emotionally drained, in fact. "Junction" is *that* good.

I had already discussed with Jack the fact that I'd scheduled his short story, "Rags," for this issue; it was a story which I first read at a recent Guilford Conference and had admired there. I had been haunted by Jack's handling of interior delusion and the surreal in "Rags." When he handed me "Junction," Jack said he hoped I'd like it as much.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As much! "Junction" deals with the breakdown of cause-and-effect and the cosmic birthing of indeterminable reality, and in some respects it reminds me of Ward Moore's "Transient" (AMAZING STORIES, February, 1960), with its emphasis upon dreams and dream-images. "Junction" is a novel which must, I think, establish Jack Dann among the most important of the newly developing young writers in sf.

Therefore, in the October issue of the magazine, immediately following "The Son of Black Morca," we'll be publishing Jack Dann's "Junction"—complete in one issue. Don't miss it!

And, as long as I'm mentioning upcoming stories, I ought not to leave out L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter's new Conan novella, "Black Sphinx of Nebthu," which is scheduled for our next issue! That should give everyone something to look forward to.

HUGO AWARDS: We published the list of Hugo Award winners in the January, 1973, issue of our companion magazine, AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION, but at that time only the winners and second- and third-place runners-up were available and I was not able to report FANTASTIC's standing except that it did not place among the top three. Since then, the total standings have been released. The winner, as with the previous year, was *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, with second place going to *Analog*, third to AMAZING SF, fourth to *Galaxy* and fifth place to FANTASTIC STORIES, *sigh* . . .

As it turned out, FANTASTIC's nomination last year was this magazine's last opportunity to achieve that honor; the *professional sf magazine* category has been abolished from the Hugo Award structure, by a vote of the members of last year's Worldcon at Los Angeles, at the business meeting. Henceforth, an award will be given to the *best editor* in the field, rather than the best magazine. I'm flattered by P. Schuyler Miller's comment (in the January, 1973, issue of *Analog*), ". . . I suspect that Ted White may be a shoe-in for bringing *Amazing* and *Fantastic* up out of the doldrums to a quality they haven't had in years"—but my own suspicion is that this change in award categories signals a dying interest in the sf magazines among sf fans and convention-goers. I would not be very surprised if someone like Damon Knight (whose *Orbit* series of anthologies published quite a few award winners and nominees before its recent cancellation by its publisher) was to be the winner at this year's Worldcon in Toronto, for instance. Well, we shall see . . .

THE BEST OF FANTASTIC: For several years, readers have suggested that we do a series of annual anthologies, not unlike those published by the editors of *F&SF* and *Analog*, republishing the best of those stories which have appeared here in book form.

Well, in fact I put together two such anthologies, *The Best From Amazing Stories* and *The Best Of Fantastic Stories*—way back in 1969! They cover the period of roughly 1952 to 1964 (FANTASTIC began publication in 1952; Joseph Ross' earlier *Best of Amazing Stories* covered that magazine's earlier years too well to invite an overlap), and skim some fine cream indeed. Also included are a long introduction to each book and introductory prefaces to each story.

The two books were eventually sold to the MacFadden-Bartell corporation at a time when that company was publishing a line of paperback books. However, in one of those publishing games of musical chairs which periodically confound the rest of us, MacFadden-Bartell divested itself of its book line, turning it over to Manor Books and retaining distribution rights. The M-B logo was modified and there was a hiatus in the publication of the books bearing that logo, but Manor Books will have already published *The Best From Amazing Stories* by the time you read this (release is slated for January) and the companion volume, *The Best of Fantastic Stories*, should be out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

within a month or so of the time this issue goes on sale. Look for them both, buy lots of copies, and maybe we can continue them on an annual basis.

—TED WHITE

SF in Dimension (cont. from page 113)

Whatever their immaturities and faults, they clearly stood alone in importance. They led the way in the restoration of mystery to speculative fantasy.

Perhaps even more important, Zelazny's soaring happy touch with language and Delany's sense of sf as a literature fit for a writer of ambition have forced the writers of speculative fantasy to reassess themselves. Because of Zelazny and Delany, it has become imperative for sf writers to challenge all the tacit limitations that have ruled the field. No one yet knows how well sf can be written. No one yet knows how much sf is capable of expressing. Roger Zelazny and Samuel Delany, by their example, have stirred the writers of speculative fantasy into beginning the inquiry.

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

Once Upon Unicorn (cont. from page 93)

this kind of movie." I couldn't argue; sometimes Arnie does know his business.

So we went out and did it. It was pretty for the camera, sunshine on sparkling dew. The wet grass was freezing my butt. I kept smiling, though; it couldn't last forever. Rillo's smile must be a silicone-implant, I thought; I'd never seen anything shake it.

When it came our turn to help sell tickets, Rillo and I started through our lines; it all seemed to be working OK, until the camera was ready for the unicorn. It was too far back, out of the shot; somebody had blown the timing. I can ad-lib; I threw in a few lines to keep things moving. Rillo can't; half the time I had to answer myself.

Someone finally shoved the unicorn on-camera. About time. And then it all went absolutely to hell in a bucket.

The damn beast cut me dead. Up front of about ten million people who had just had the unicorn story laid on them with a double scoop, that God-damned creature ambled up, sniffed, and laid its head in *Rillo's* lap.

I guess even a freak antelope has to be right once in a while.

—F. M. BUSBY

ON SALE NOW IN APRIL THRILLING S F. RIDER IN THE SKY, BY **RAYMOND F. JONES,** THE MIRROR, BY **ALAN E. NOURSE,** NOW IS FOREVER, BY **DOBBIN THORPE,** THE OTHER INHABITANT, BY **EDWARD W. LUDWIG,** NO END OF TIME, BY **PHYLLIS GOTLIEB,** THE PIROKIN EFFECT, BY **LARRY EISENBERG,** and WHERE IS EVERYBODY?, BY **BEN BOVA.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

RATES AND TERMS: Ultimate Fiction Group consists of two books . . . Amazing & Fantastic. Space can only be bought on GROUP BASIS at the rate of $.50 per word . . . (including name and address). Minimum order of $5.00 (10 words). Payment must accompany copy except when ads are placed by accredited Advertising agency. Frequency discount: 5% for 6 months. 10% for 12 months paid in advance.

GENERAL INFORMATION: First word in all ads set in bold caps at no extra charge. Additional words may be set in bold caps at 5¢ extra per word. All copy subject to publisher's approval. Closing Date: 1st of the 3rd preceding month (for example, April issue closes January 1st). Send order and remittance to: *Print Advertising Rep., Inc., 16 West 46th St., New York, N.Y. 10036*

BOOKS

MOONBROTH has monsters, werewolves, vampires, witchcraft, occult fiction, fact, illustrations. Introductory copy 25¢. Dept. H. Box C, Bellevue, WA. 98009.

"complete illustrated catalog of all "IN Print" SF and Fantasy paperbacks and hardcover books. Over 1,000 titles. No obligation. Write to: ATC SF Books, Suite 1500-Al, 2 Penn Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10001.

Evidences for creation, $1.00; evidence against evolution 50¢, Christian Evidence League, Malverne, N.Y. 11565.

THE SOURCE OF FANTASY: *Your mind*, explained and used in the applied philosophy of the book Dianetics: Modern Science of Mental Health by L. Ron Hubbard. Send $5.00 to Bookstore-UF, Founding Church of Scientology, 1812 19th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Name the book-we'll find it for you! Out of print book specialists. All subjects. (Title alone *is sufficient*). *Write-no obligation.* Books-On-File, Dept. AMF, Box 101, Guttenberg, N.J. 07093.

BOOKS & MAGAZINES

SEND FOR FREE SCIENCE FICTION-FANTASY CATALOG. *Michael Cancellari, Canford Book* Corral, Box 216, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

ADULT S-F fan magazine. Praised by top s-f authors. Shocking fiction, uncensored opinions, outrageous reviews. $1. per issue. Richard Geis, POB 11408, Portland, OR 97211.

SELLING COMIC BOOKS, PULPS (SHADOW, AMAZING, SPIDER, ETC.), MAGAZINES RADIO PREMIMUMS, ETC. FROM 1900-1972. CATALOGUE 50¢. ROGOFSKY, BOX AF1102, FLUSHING, NEW YORK 11354.

100 page catalog Arkham Fantasy Burroughs, Mirage Press Science Fiction pulp, paperbacks, comics. Send 75¢ Passaic Book Center, 594 Main Avenue, Passaic, N.J. 07055.

X-Underground Journal of Occult. $1.00. Rod Frye, Box 7374, Hampton, Virginia 23366.

How to have more money-This principle was revealed by Jesus five times in the Bible. There is no work, planning or prayer involved. $1.00 (Airmail $1.25). Satisfaction guaranteed. Judith 1059 E Fairview Blvd., Dept. M, Inglewood, Calif. 90302.

MISCELLANEOUS

WANTED-original fantasy stories. For info. write Al D. Cockrell, Box 125, Bronson, Mi. 49028

"PLANET IN REBELLION." 40¢ ppd. METHODS 416K, Palo Alto Ave. Mountain View, Ca. 94040.

YOU command Starships in Alien Space. Send $3 *for all skill, Adult wargame. Louis Zocchi*, 388F Montana, Victorville, Calif. 92392.

IF YOU AREN'T APE about exercise, be a cat. Copy the Feline Mystique. $1, El Gato, Box 4231, Dearborn, Michigan 48126.

VOODOO-Witchcraft books, curios, illustrated catalog 10¢. Imports, P.O. Box 2010, Toluca Lake, Calif. 91602.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

EARN college degrees at home. Many subjects. FLORIDA STATE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, Post *Office* Box 1674, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33302.

PERSONALS

ORDINATIONS by mail. Information for stamp. Crown of Life Fellowship, Inc., Box 9048, Spokane, WA. 99209.

INSTRUCTION

STUDY WITCHCRAFT, Secret Book, Newsletters, $1. STARWISE SOCIETY, BOX 9094SFA, Cleveland, OH 44137

BUSINESS OPORTUNITIES

START A MAIL ORDER IMPORTING business. Fantastic! Small capital. Directory $2.00. Fred Hettick, Box 1495, Bismark, North Dakota 58501.

SCIENCE

ANTIGRAVITY DEVICE. Brochure rushed free. AGD, Box 3062 UF, Bartlesville, Oklahoma 74003.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Look who's smiling now!"

Sometimes a man sets his ambitions high enough to make skeptics smile. But how often he gets the last laugh! "At the time I started studying with LaSalle, I was working as a factory clerk. Before completing the course I was transferred to cost accounting and my salary was increased by $1800. Now, having completed the course, I'm in charge of the department and headed for the five figure bracket. LaSalle's course helped me pull myself out of a boring and ill-paid job into a position of almost unlimited opportunity."

The words in quotes come directly from one of the pleased reports that are sent to us by LaSalle graduates. LaSalle files contain many letters from men and women who have increased their earnings with the help of LaSalle training. You, too, can prepare for the career opportunity of your choice through LaSalle home study —without interfering with your present work—and by devoting only a little of your spare time.

—LaSalle has been a leader in home education for more than sixty years, enrolling over 2,000,000 ambitious men and women in its many courses. You study under the supervision of LaSalle's experienced faculty. Upon satisfactory completion of your study, you receive the LaSalle diploma—a respected credential.

Mailing the LaSalle coupon below may be the first step toward preparing yourself for a better job, higher pay, and the many good things that go with success. Simply check the program in which you are most interested, and we will send you a valuable free booklet describing the opportunities in that field. There is no obligation. LaSalle, 417 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60605.

© 1971 LaSalle Extension University

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

A Correspondence Institution • **417 S. Dearborn Street, Dept. 87-008, Chicago, Illinois 60605**

Please send me, without cost or obligation, FREE booklet and full information on the field I have checked below:

ACCOUNTING
- ☐ Complete Accounting
- ☐ Income Tax
- ☐ CPA Training
- ☐ Bookkeeping

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Management Training

REAL ESTATE
- ☐ Complete Real Estate
- ☐ Real Estate Brokerage

TRAFFIC & TRANSPORTATION
- ☐ Complete Training

STENOTYPE
- ☐ Machine Shorthand

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION
- ☐ French ☐ Spanish

COMPUTER PROGRAMMING
- ☐ Basic Training

DRAFTING
- ☐ Complete Training

DIESEL MECHANICS
- ☐ Basic Training

AIR CONDITIONING & REFRIGERATION
- ☐ Basic Training

INTERIOR DECORATING
- ☐ Complete Training

DENTAL OFFICE ASSISTANT
- ☐ Complete Training

ART TRAINING
- ☐ Complete Training

SECRETARIAL
- ☐ Complete Training

LAW COURSES
- ☐ Bachelor of Laws Degree
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Claim Adjusting Law
- ☐ Law for Police Officers

No state accepts any law home study course, including LaSalle's, as sufficient education to qualify for admission to practice law.

MOTEL/HOTEL MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Motel Management
- ☐ Hotel Management

RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT
- ☐ Management Training

WRITING
- ☐ Non-Fiction ☐ Fiction

MUSIC INSTRUCTION
- ☐ Piano ☐ Guitar ☐ Other

HIGH SCHOOL
- ☐ High School Diploma

Mr.
Mrs. .....Age....
Miss *(Circle title and please print)*

Address .....Apt. No.....

City & State .....Zip.....

00D 7

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED